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## THE ENGLISH CEMETERY AT SURAT: PRE-COLONIAL CULTURAL ENCOUNTERS IN WESTERN INDIA

Chris Scarre, FSA, and Judith Roberts\*

*During the seventeenth century East India Company merchants settled in several cities of western India under the control of the Mughal Empire. The most important of these was Surat in Gujarat, where an English cemetery of impressive brick and stucco tombs was established. The style and nature of these monuments provide an insight into the cultural interactions that took place between the English merchants and the local population, as well as indicating the political aspirations of the East India Company officials. A description of these tombs, the earliest dating to 1649, is followed by a discussion of the origins of the cemetery, the chronology of the tombs and the identity and status of the dead. It is shown how the adoption of Indo-Islamic architectural styles for the earliest tombs was modified during the eighteenth century by the increasing use of Western architectural features, in line with growing British political power in India during this period. Changing architectural styles are paralleled by the changing attitudes of British visitors to the tombs from the seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.*

Funerary and religious monuments provide eloquent testimony to interactions between contrasting cultural traditions. European colonialism brought Western architectural traditions to many regions of Africa, Asia and the Americas, along with religious and social practices. In many of these encounters, Europeans were the dominant partners virtually from the outset. It is not surprising in such a context that the Aztec temples at the centre of Mexico City were demolished and replaced by a Christian cathedral within ten years of the Spanish conquest. In India, however, the first European contacts were more varied in character, and the interaction between Europeans and indigenous populations and rulers was more complex. The Portuguese established a chain of fortified coastal towns which formed the *Estado da Índia* under the control of a Viceroy, based at Goa, who was appointed by the Portuguese Crown.<sup>1</sup> When British and Dutch merchants arrived in western India a century later, however, they adopted a very different policy. Their objective was trade, and though backed by their respective governments these were not colonialist ventures aiming to control sectors of the Indian coast. The difference is clearly reflected in the buildings and material remains of the cities: Goa and other Portuguese colonies were European constructs with state-of-the-art artillery fortifications

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and white-painted Christian churches in dominant positions; whereas the British and Dutch in Indian cities espoused local architectural forms (albeit in sometimes novel ways) and were only individual elements in a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic setting.

The espousal of local architectural forms is nowhere more clearly seen than in the tombs built by Dutch and British merchants at the cities from which they operated. In the north-west Indian state of Gujarat, there are significant Dutch cemeteries at Broach (Bharuch) and Ahmedabad (the regional capital), and a smaller British cemetery at Cambay (Khambhat). The most impressive groups of tombs are, however, those of the Dutch and British ('English') cemeteries of Surat. These pre-date the foundation of the famous South Park Street Cemetery in Calcutta (1767) by 120 years.

The English Cemetery at Surat is indeed the earliest of the cemeteries founded by the traders of the East India Company in South Asia. Along with famous cemeteries at Calcutta, Agra and Madras, and the now destroyed tombs at Bombay, it provides one of the most visible reminders of the early British presence in the subcontinent. Where it differs from the others, however, is in its early date and the specific cultural and political circumstances under which it was founded.

The city of Surat was the leading port of the west coast of India until the rise of Bombay during the eighteenth century. Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, a French traveller who visited Surat in the 1630s, described it as 'the sole port in the whole empire of the Mughal'.<sup>2</sup> It lay on the banks of the Tapti river, some two miles upstream from its junction with the Indian Ocean. The city had good overland connections both south and north along the coast, and into the interior towards Ahmedabad, the regional capital and centre of government (fig 1). Northward-bound traffic had to cross the river by ferry before continuing towards Broach and Cambay. Smaller vessels could sail directly up the Tapti to the Surat waterfront, where customs house, quaysides and warehouses were located. Overlooking them was Surat Castle, a fortress built in 1540-6 to control the river and protect the town.<sup>3</sup> The Tapti had a major limitation, however, in that the shallows near its mouth rendered it impassable to the European ocean-going vessels that began to ply the Indian Ocean sea lanes from the end of the fifteenth century. These European vessels were instead obliged to anchor in a shallow but sheltered lagoon lying just north of the Tapti estuary, and here at Swally Hole (or Swally Marine) a subsidiary settlement grew up at which cargoes were unloaded and transferred either to smaller vessels, for the final stage of the journey up the Tapti, or on to bullock carts for overland transport for the remaining ten miles to Surat (fig 2).<sup>4</sup>

Until 1573, Surat was part of the Sultanate of Gujarat, with its capital inland at Ahmedabad. In that year, however, the Sultanate was conquered by the Mughal ruler Akbar, and henceforth Surat became the principal port of the powerful Mughal Empire. It was thus an obvious locus for European merchants seeking to establish trading centres (or 'factories' as they were known) in the early years of the seventeenth century. The Portuguese had founded a series of fortified coastal towns in the sixteenth century, from Ormuz at the mouth of the Persian Gulf down to Galle on Sri Lanka. These were Christian territories directly controlled by Portugal. The European merchants who a century later founded trading settlements within the Mughal Empire did so on very different terms, as a commercial rather than a political enterprise, and under licence from the Mughal state.

The charter establishing the English East India Company was issued by Elizabeth I in December 1600, but it was not until 1607 that the Company attempted to establish a 'factory' at Surat, and only from 1613 was there a permanent British presence.<sup>5</sup> In the decades that followed the British factory endured a series of vicissitudes, constantly at odds with both the

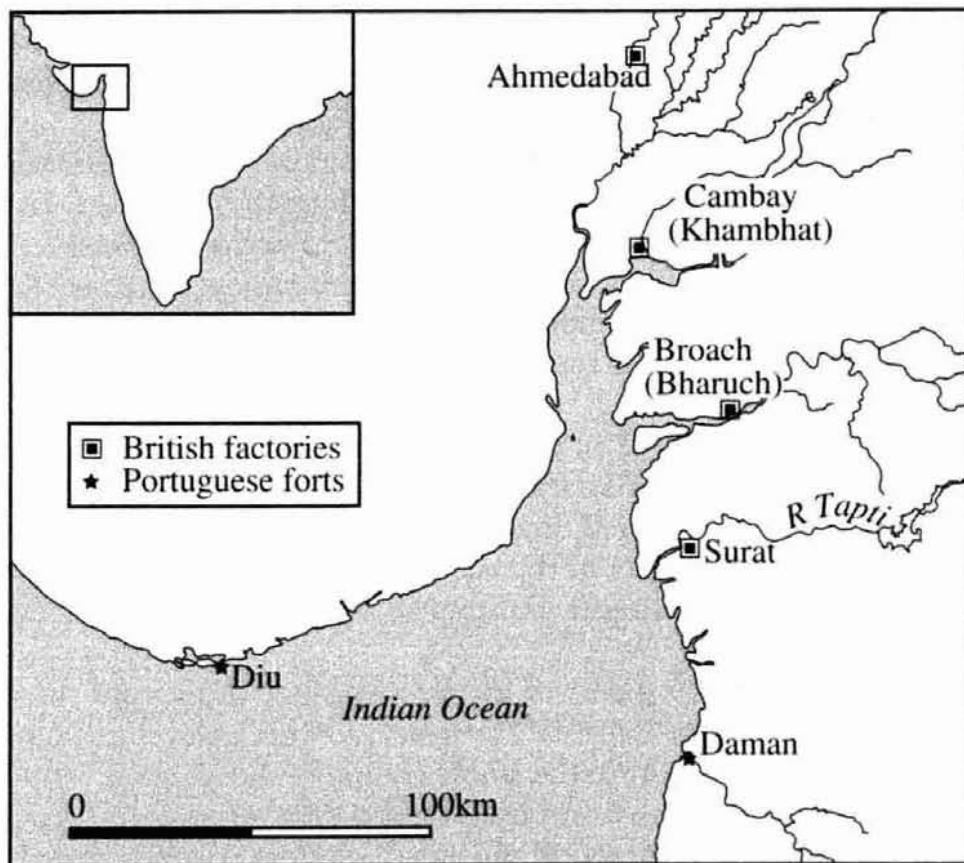


Fig 1. British factories and Portuguese forts in Gujarat in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries

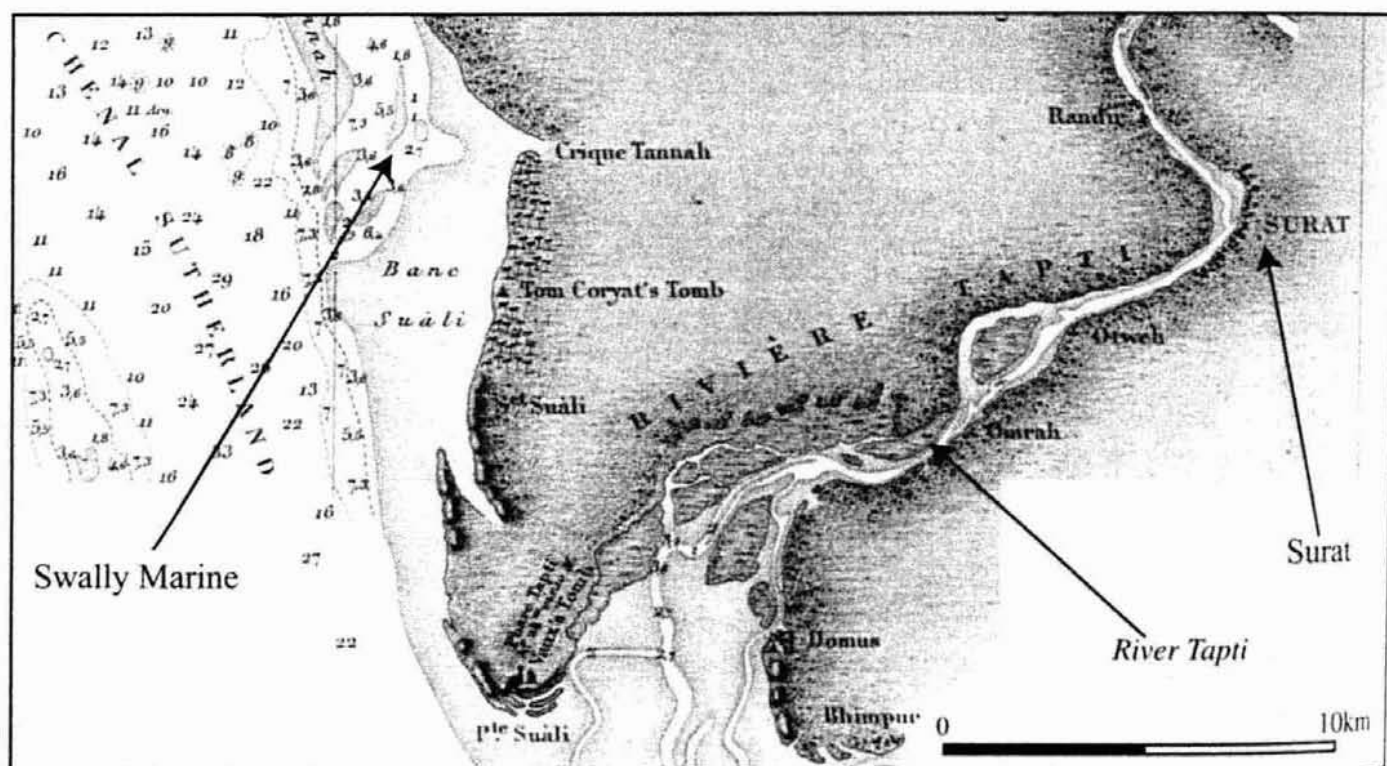


Fig 2. Nineteenth-century map showing the mouth of the River Tapti and the location of Swally Marine and Surat



Portuguese and the Dutch. Portuguese power was on the wane, but the Dutch stranglehold on the trade with the Spice Islands made them powerful rivals, especially when they established their own factory at Surat in 1617. By the end of the seventeenth century, indeed, there were five competing factories at Surat – British, Dutch, French, Portuguese and Danish – though the British and Dutch establishments were the largest.

Surat remained the principal centre of British activity throughout the seventeenth century, with subsidiary factories being established in the coastal centres of Broach and Cambay, and at the regional capital of Ahmedabad. Ahmedabad was the seat of the Mughal regional governor and was also close to the major indigo-producing area at Sarkej. The export of indigo was a key element of the Surat trade, along with locally produced textiles, though the city also served as an entrepôt for spices from south-east Asia, and for trade with the Ottoman Empire via the Persian Gulf. The principal officer of the East India Company at Surat was the president, who was responsible for operations at the other centres and directly answerable to the board of directors in London. The primacy of Surat was ended in 1687 when the centre of East India Company operations in India was transferred to Bombay, which had been ceded to Britain by the Portuguese in 1661, and the president at Surat became subordinate to the Governor of Bombay.

#### THE FOUNDATION OF THE CEMETERY

A significant problem for the East India Company at Surat from its earliest days was the securing of suitable premises from which to operate. In August 1615 the English ambassador to the Mughal court, Sir Thomas Roe, attempted to secure permission from Prince Khurram 'to buy or hyre any house in his ports, where they might quietly dwell and no man to disturbe or displace them'. The Mughal rulers were steadfastly opposed, however: 'It was absolutely refused upon no conditions that wee should buy or build a house, nor hyre none near the castle or upon the water'.<sup>6</sup> The East India Company was accordingly obliged to lease premises for its factory, and this involved moving more than once during the seventeenth century.<sup>7</sup> Thus John Fryer, who went out to India as surgeon to the East India Company and spent the year 1674–5 at Surat, noted that 'The House the English live in at Surat, is partly the King's Gift, partly hired';<sup>8</sup> and in 1690 John Ovington, chaplain to the English Factory 1690–3, noted: 'The House provided for the Entertainment of the *English* at *Suratt* belongs to the Mogul'.<sup>9</sup> A valuation of Company possessions in 1649 refers to 'two houses at Agra and Ahmadabad' but none at Surat.<sup>10</sup> The same document does, however, record that the Company owned 'a garden at Surat, worth 1500l' and Ovington twice refers to gardens in his account of Company life in the 1690s:

The president upon Solemn Days generally invites the whole Factory abroad to some pleasant Garden adjacent to the City, where they may sit shaded from the Beams of the Sun, and refresht by the Neighbourhood of *Tanques* and Water-works.<sup>11</sup>

and

The Evenings and the Mornings being allay'd with moderate Breezes, and cool and temperate in respect of the Heat when the Sun is at the Height, invite the Factors almost daily to the Groves or Gardens near the Water side, there to spend an hour or two with a Bottle of Wine, and cold Collation which they carry with them.<sup>12</sup>

Neither mention appears to refer specifically to the garden owned by the Company at Surat in the 1649 valuation, and indeed Fryer clarifies the point: 'The *English* had a neat one, but *Seva Gi*'s coming, destroyed it'.<sup>13</sup>

The English Cemetery (like the English Factory) does not appear on the list of Company possessions in August 1649, although it may already have been in existence since Francis Breton, president of the English Factory 1644–9, had been buried there the previous month. (The valuation may, of course, relate to a state of affairs before the cemetery was established.) The circumstances of Francis Breton's death could be significant in relation to his burial place and the cemetery's origins. He was planning to return home at the beginning of 1649, when 'an unexpected difficulty arose, for the Governor of Surat, Muizz-ul-Mulk, alarmed at the attitude of the Dutch and leaning much, it would seem, on the counsel of his old friend the English president, positively forbade the latter to leave Surat for the present'.<sup>14</sup> Breton died at Surat in the July of that year.

It is possible, then, that the land for the cemetery was given (or its purchase authorized) by Muizz-ul-Mulk in specific recognition of his close relations with Francis Breton. On the other hand, the speed with which Breton was buried requires that negotiations must have been concluded very quickly: a letter of 25 January 1650 from Breton's successor as president, Thomas Merry, states that Breton was buried the day following his death.<sup>15</sup> It may be more realistic to assume that the use of the land for the cemetery had already been approved, or indeed that the cemetery was already in operation.

There appears, however, to be no evidence for a cemetery in this location before Francis Breton's death in 1649. The earliest extant inscription in the Dutch Cemetery at Surat dates to 1642, preceding Francis Breton's tomb by seven years (Magdalena Haijers, d 1642, widow of Paulus Croocq); the earliest surviving inscriptions in the Dutch cemeteries at Ahmedabad and Broach both date to 1654.<sup>16</sup> It may be that the setting aside of burial grounds for the European companies began in the 1640s. The question remains as to where Company employees had previously been buried; such as those who died (fourteen of the twenty-one Factory employees, including the president, Rastell) in the great famine of 1631.<sup>17</sup> What does seem clear is that these burial grounds – at Surat, Ahmedabad, Broach and other centres – were set up specifically and exclusively for the burial of Europeans of different nationalities. Thus the French and Portuguese companies at Surat had their own separate burial grounds. The Armenian Cemetery, adjacent to the Dutch Cemetery at Surat, may have an even earlier origin: its oldest inscription is dated 1579.<sup>18</sup>

Little reference to the tombs was found in the archives of the East India Company at the British Library in London, or in supplementary material held in the Bodleian Library at Oxford. Since the tombs do not feature in the Company accounts, it is probable that they were built at the expense of their occupants or their relatives. As early as 1616, a letter from the Surat factors declares: 'the custom hath bin to interr our dead at the Companies Charge, but the tombe or any extraordinaryes are to bee paid out of their owne meanes'.<sup>19</sup> A nineteenth-century account refers to a bill of 6,000 rupees for the repair of the principal tomb in the Dutch Cemetery being presented to the Dutch East India Company, but this does not in itself indicate that this was how their construction was initially financed.<sup>20</sup> Curl draws a distinction between the Dutch tombs, built by builders imported from the Netherlands, and the British tombs, built by local craftsmen.<sup>21</sup> There is little evidence in the form or details of the buildings themselves for the presence of European craftsmen, and local builders would no doubt have been primarily responsible for their construction. The latter must have drawn up the designs in accordance with the instructions of those who commissioned them, but both the general conception of the

tombs – free-standing monuments with domes and pinnacles – and the details of the designs and decoration – place them firmly within the Indo-Islamic architectural tradition. This conclusion is reinforced by the indigenous nature of the construction technique (painted and moulded stucco over a brick core); the use of stucco, in particular, has a long history in India.<sup>22</sup>

### A DESCRIPTION OF THE CEMETERY

The Dutch and English cemeteries were on the northern edge of Surat, outside the city walls, though urban expansion has rapidly overtaken them. This process had already begun in the eighteenth century since the Dutch Cemetery lay within the circuit of the outer wall built in 1715 (fig 3).

The English Cemetery at Surat contains seventeen substantial monuments (leaving aside simple table tombs) (figs 4–6).<sup>23</sup> All of these monuments are constructed of brick covered with a thick surface of yellow stucco. The stucco has been extensively moulded for architectural features and ornamental details in relief. In some places (generally in sheltered positions) there are traces of painted decoration, and it is possible that these tombs were originally more extensively painted.

#### Tomb 1

One of a trio of matching tombs in the south-eastern corner of the cemetery (fig 7). A square plinth with projecting rectangular corners supports a tall monument with a single, large round-headed opening in each side springing from splayed corner piers with attached three-quarter columns rising to Ionic capitals. These are surmounted by a simple classical entablature, which is curiously separated from the capitals by a deep recess. Traces of painted brickwork pattern survive in the spandrels. Three broad steps between projecting corners on the west side give access to the plinth. This has at its centre a table tomb oriented east–west in the centre of the plinth with the grave slab of William and Elizabeth Price (d 1774 and 1775). The monument is covered by a plain hemispherical dome springing from a moulded ring and having a central finial; there are further finials at the corners of the entablature. A painted band encircles the base of the dome interior.

#### Tomb 2

Similar to Tomb 1, but with remains of foliate motifs in relief-moulded stucco in the spandrels, and no steps leading up to the plinth. The table tomb at the centre supports the grave slab of Mary Price (d 1761).

#### Tomb 3

Similar to Tomb 1, though heavily restored, particularly the painted brickwork decoration in the spandrels. The entablature and capitals are particularly well preserved (fig 8). Shallow steps on the west side lead up to the plinth, as in Tomb 1. No inscription.

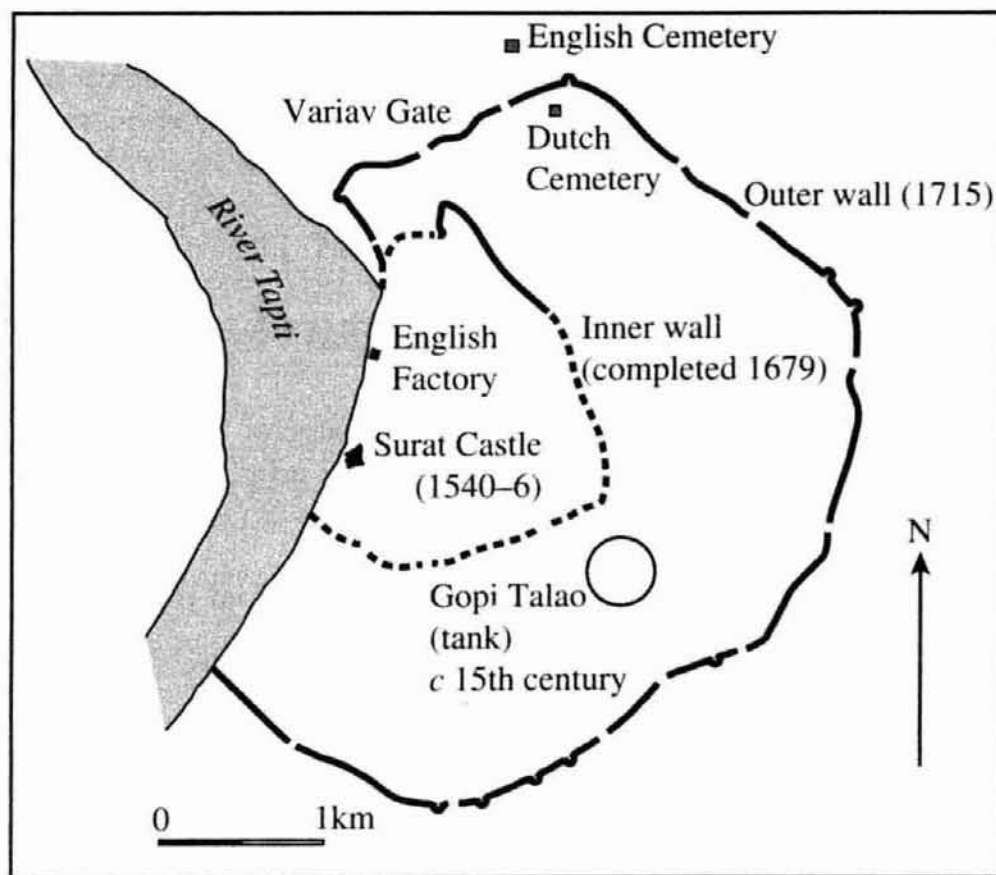


Fig 3. Surat in the eighteenth century (after R N Mehta)

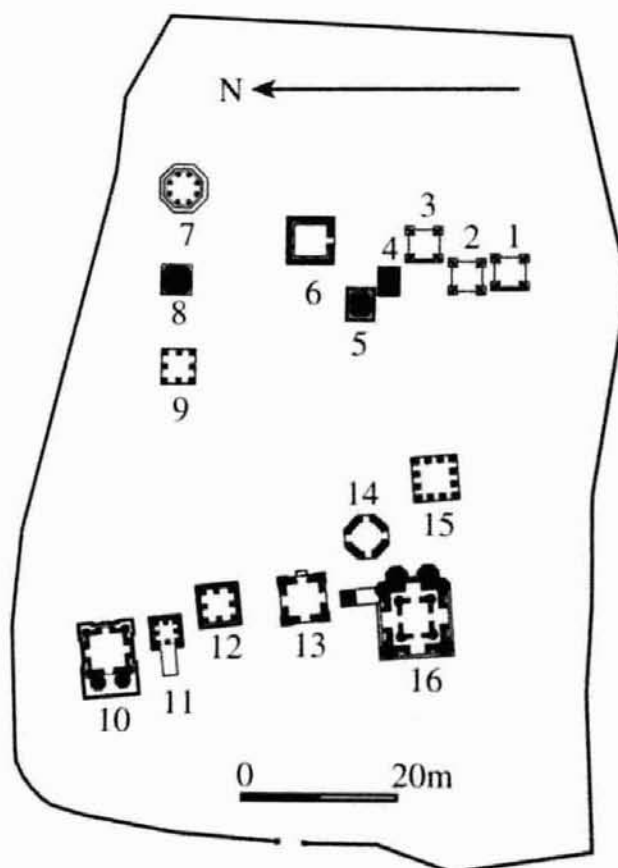


Fig 4. Plan of the English Cemetery at Surat



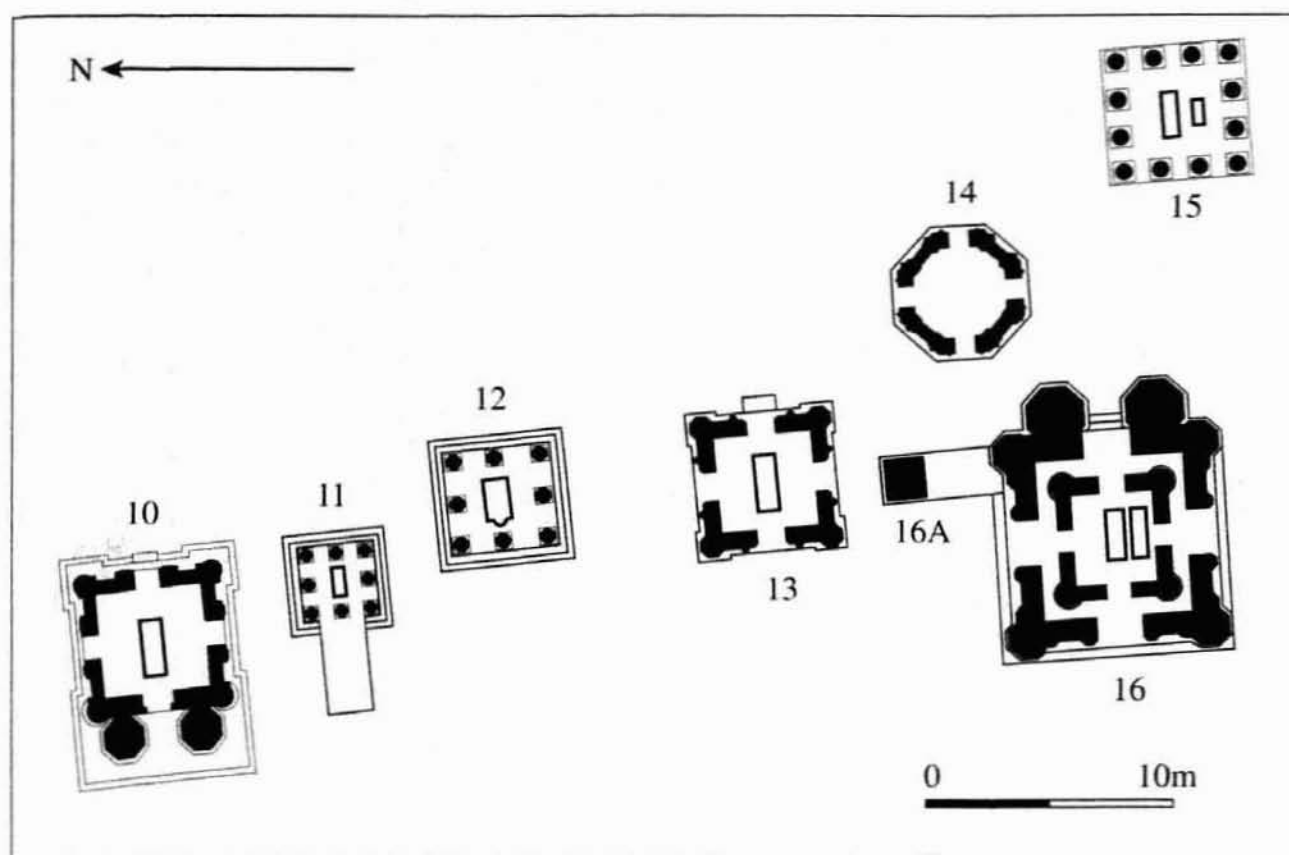


Fig 5. The English Cemetery at Surat: detail of the western sector

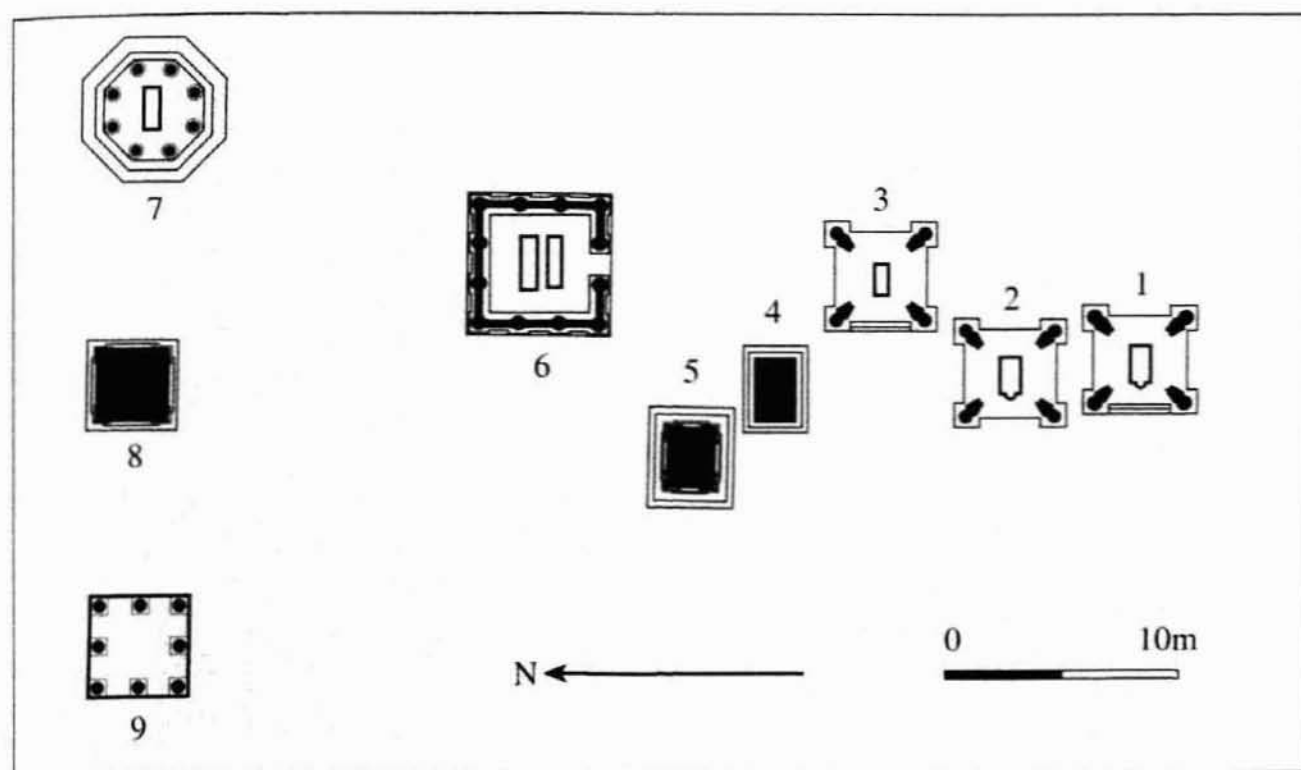


Fig 6. The English Cemetery at Surat: detail of the eastern sector



Fig 7. Trio of eighteenth-century tombs in the south-east corner of the cemetery (Tombs 1-3)



Fig 8. Tomb 3: detail of Ionic capital

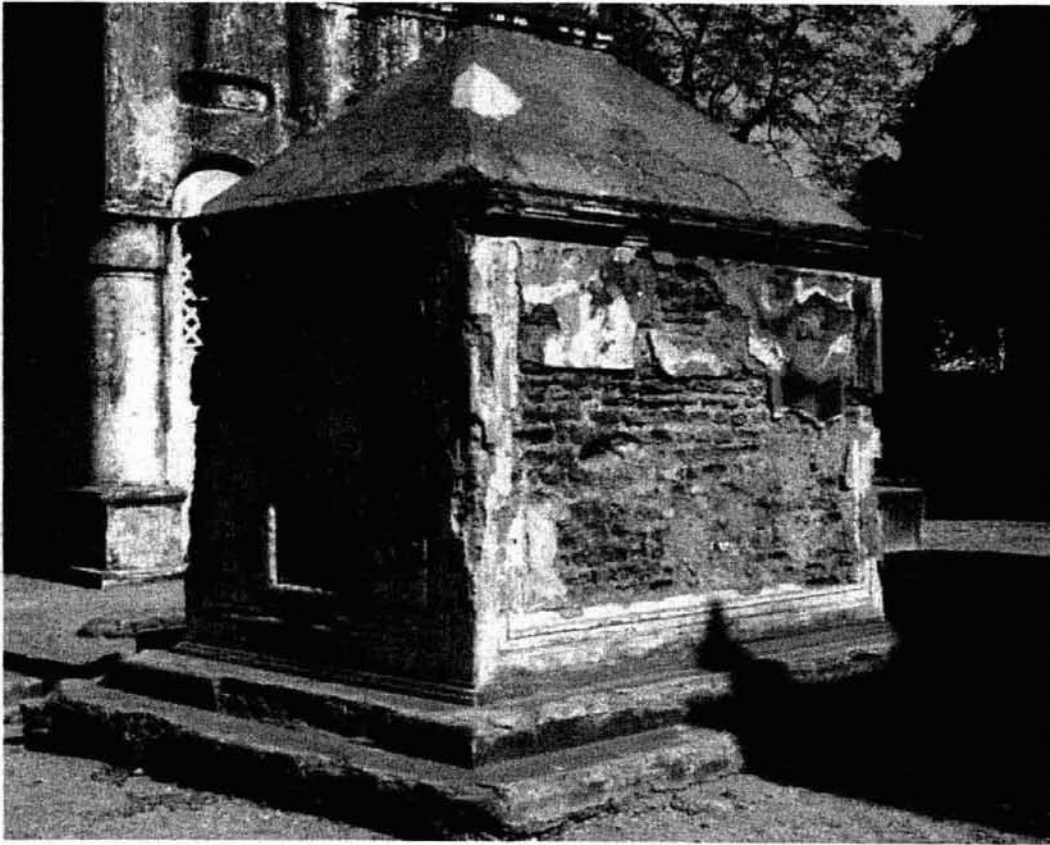


Fig 9. Tomb 4 (Daniel Seton, d 1803)

#### Tomb 4

A stepped plinth supporting a solid rectangular monument with hipped capping on a projecting cornice (fig 9). Each face of the tomb is a rectangular panel framed by a shallow moulding. A vertical stone grave slab to Daniel Seton (d 1803) is recessed into the western face of the tomb.

#### Tomb 5

Similar in general conception to Tomb 4 but with recessed corners: a solid rectangular structure with a vertical stone slab recessed into the western face recording the death of Edward Galley (d 1804). In place of the hipped capping of Tomb 4, Tomb 5 is capped by a hemispherical dome with a (broken) central finial springing from three stepped rings (fig 10). There are traces of further finials at each corner.

#### Tomb 6

A square structure covered by a hemispherical dome with tall central finial (fig 11). Four matching facades each have an arcade of three round-headed arches on attached semicircular half-columns (three-quarter at the corners). Within each arch is a rectangular diagonally latticed window, save in the centre of the south face where a square-headed door gives access to the tomb interior. This contains two table tombs, covered by debris (no inscriptions visible). A



Fig 10. Tomb 5 (Edward Galley, d 1804)

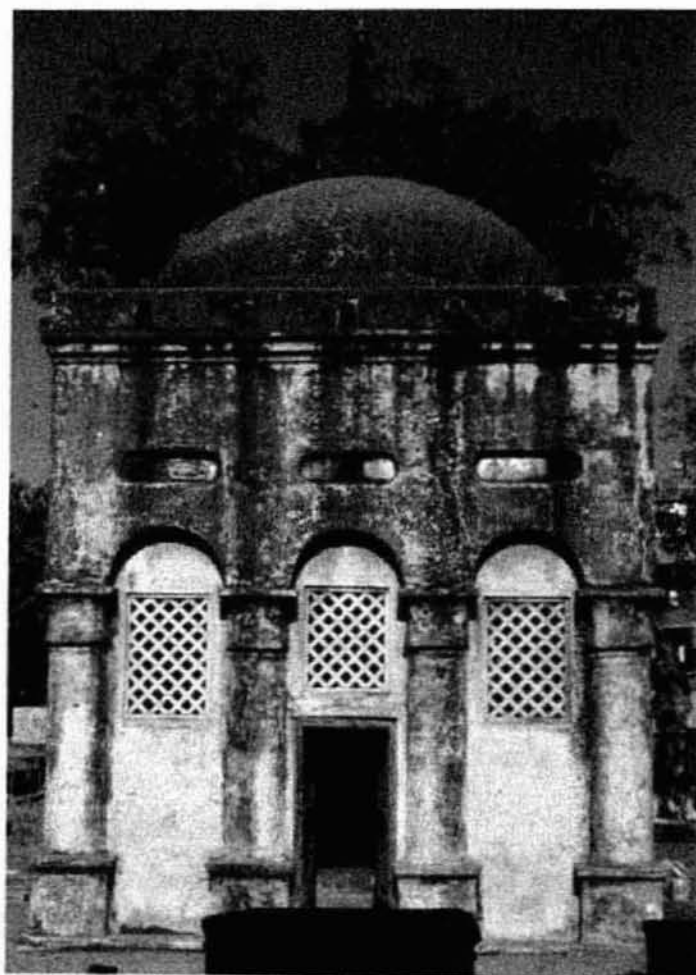


Fig 11. Tomb 6 from the south



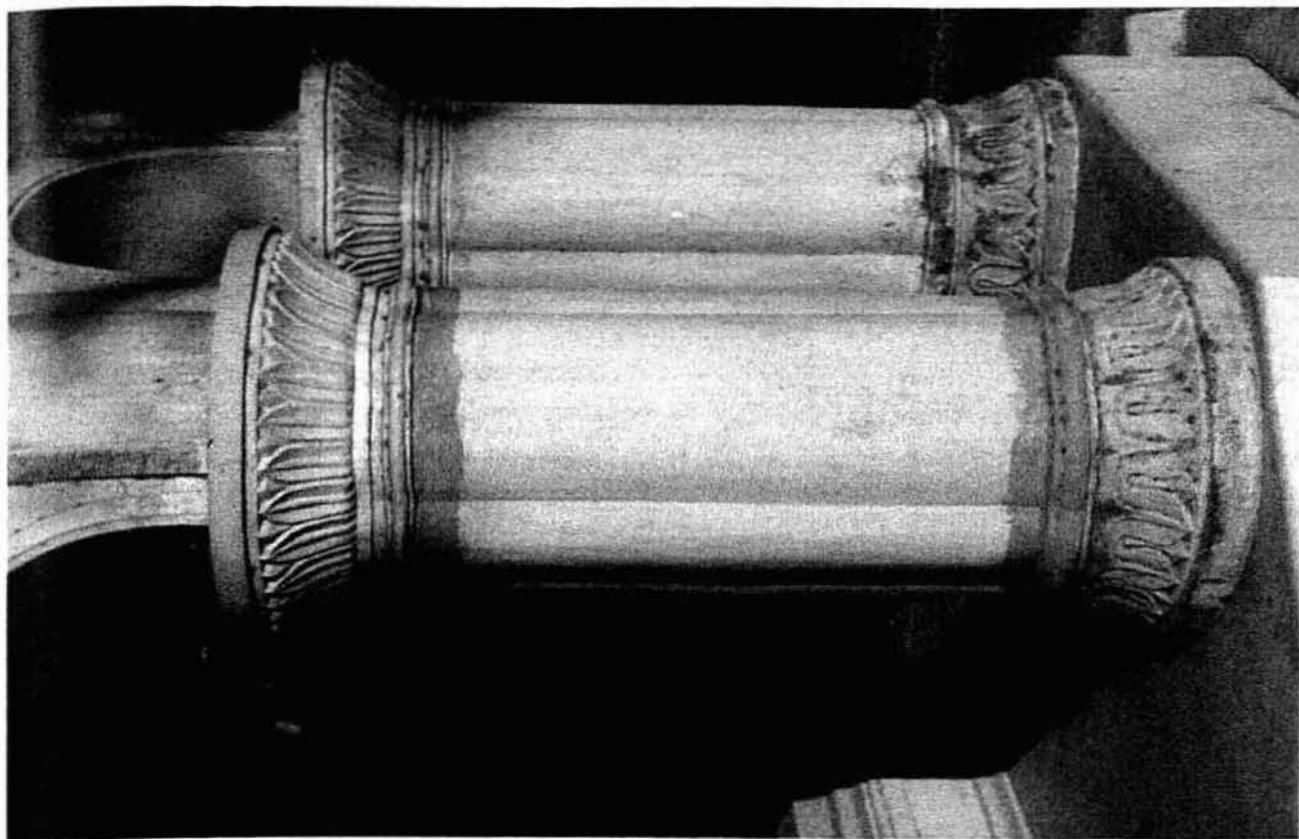


Fig 13. Tomb 7: detail of column clusters

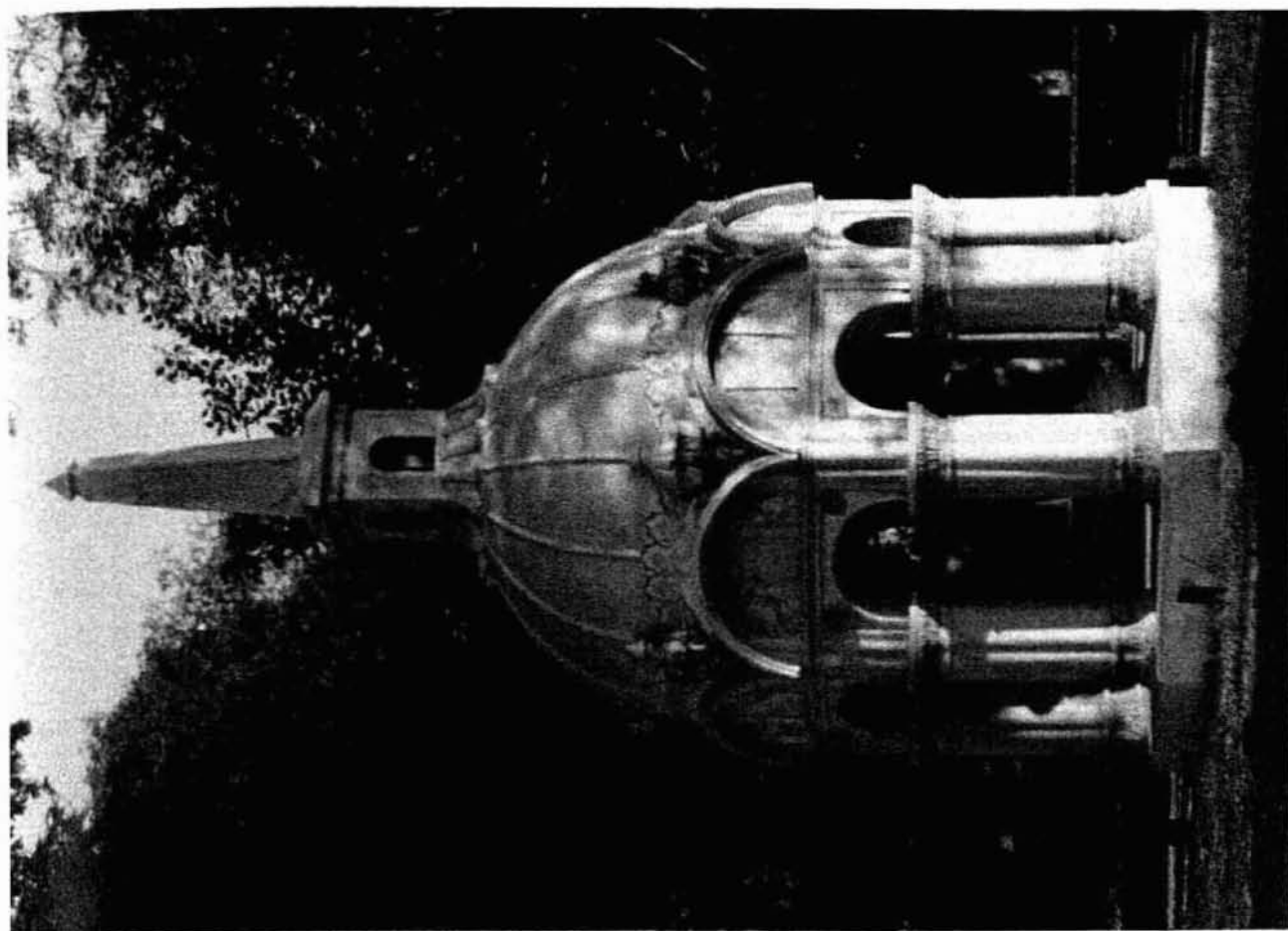


Fig 12. Tomb 7 from the north west

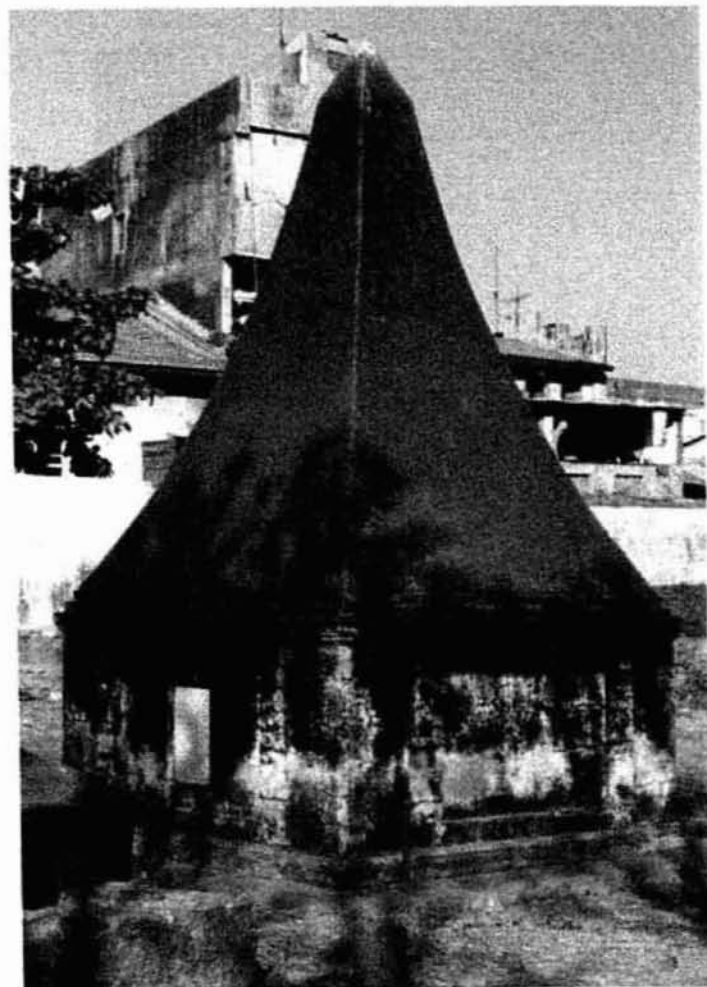


Fig 14. Tomb 8 (William Forbes, d 1811)

simple parapet with small round-headed openings surmounts the tomb above a cornice. There is a finial at each corner.

### Tomb 7

A pavilion-type tomb with an octagonal plinth supporting eight columns (each a cluster of eight attached shafts) rising to semicircular arches with an elegant ribbed dome above (figs 12 and 13). The dome rises from a series of eight arched moulded pediments coinciding with the openings below; within these pediments are elaborate decorative panels in moulded stucco, with traces of painted designs on the northern and north-eastern sides. From the springing of each pair of pediments rises a stubby finial moulded in relief. The central finial at the summit of the dome is a four-sided plain obelisk placed diagonally on a square base pierced by round-headed openings. In the centre of the tomb beneath the dome is a grave marked by a stepped plinth oriented east-west; no inscription survives.

### Tomb 8

A solid quadrangular tomb similar to Tomb 4 but with a square rather than a rectangular plan and a tall pyramidal capping with concave faces, resolved at the apex with a small pyramid (fig 14). The capping springs from a stepped base similar to that of Tomb 5. A vertical stone slab recessed into the west face gives the name of William Forbes (d 1811).

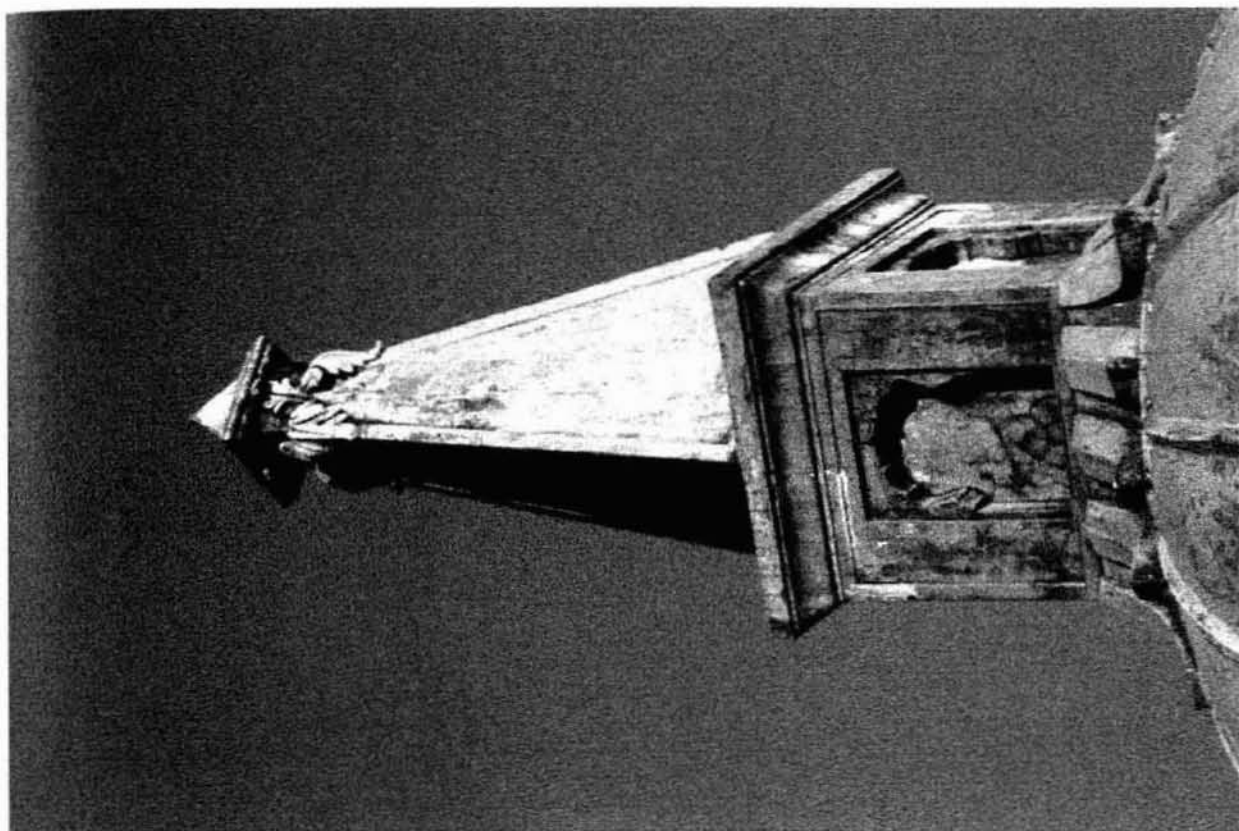


Fig 16. Tomb 9: detail of central finial

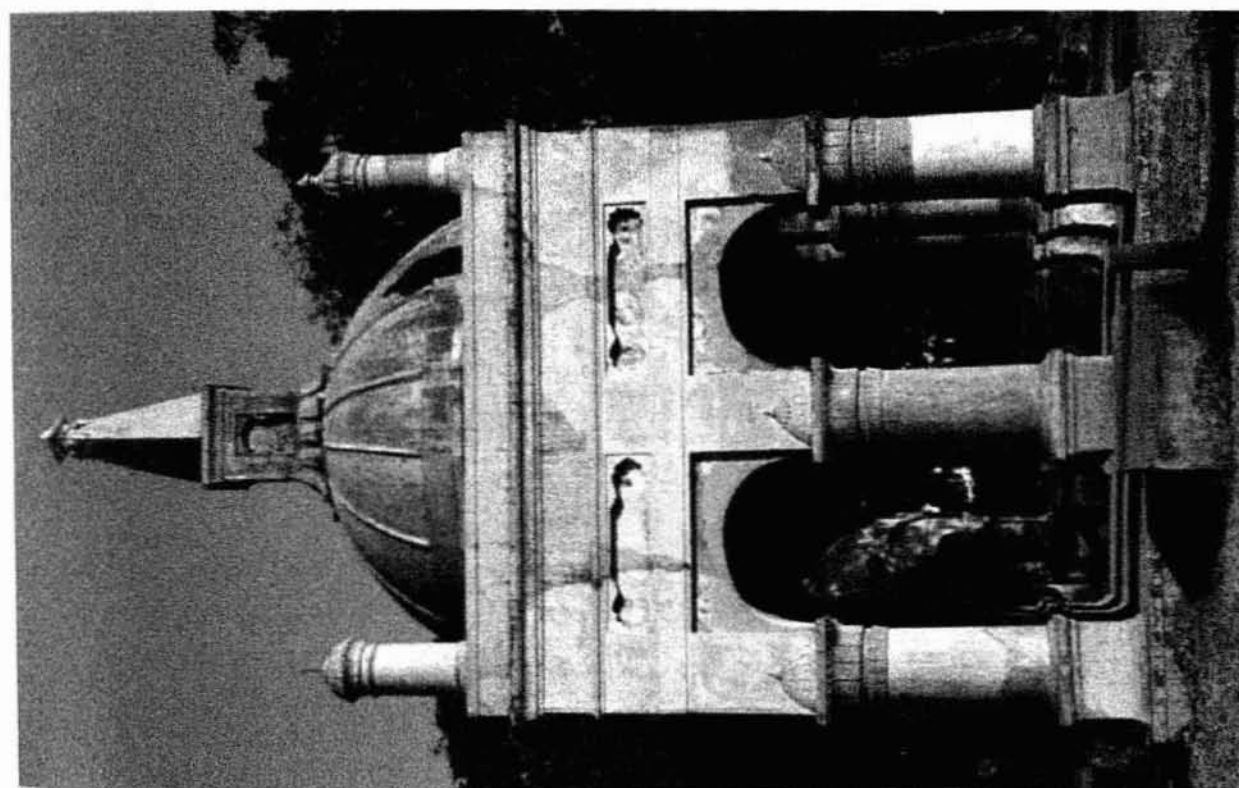


Fig 15. Tomb 9 from the west

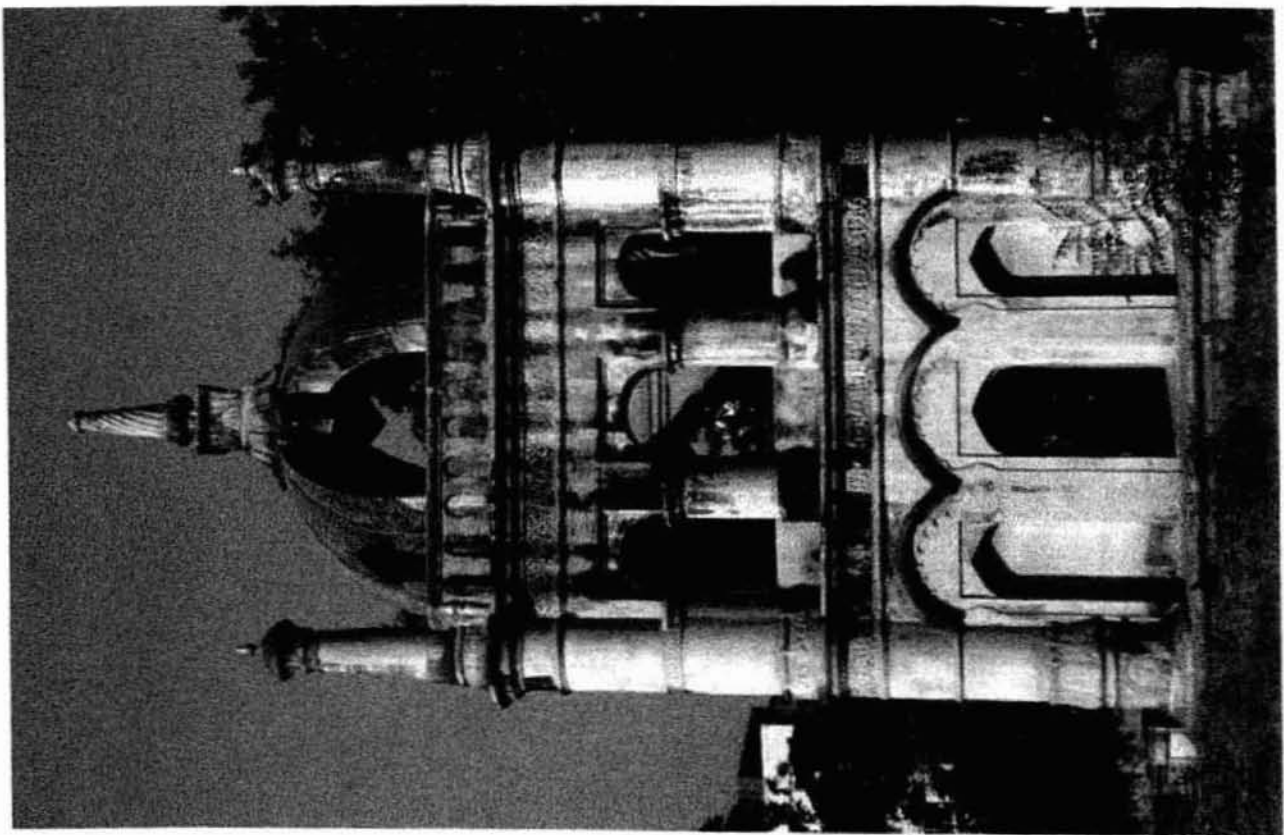


Fig 17. Tomb 10: the east front (Gerald Aungier,  
d 1677)

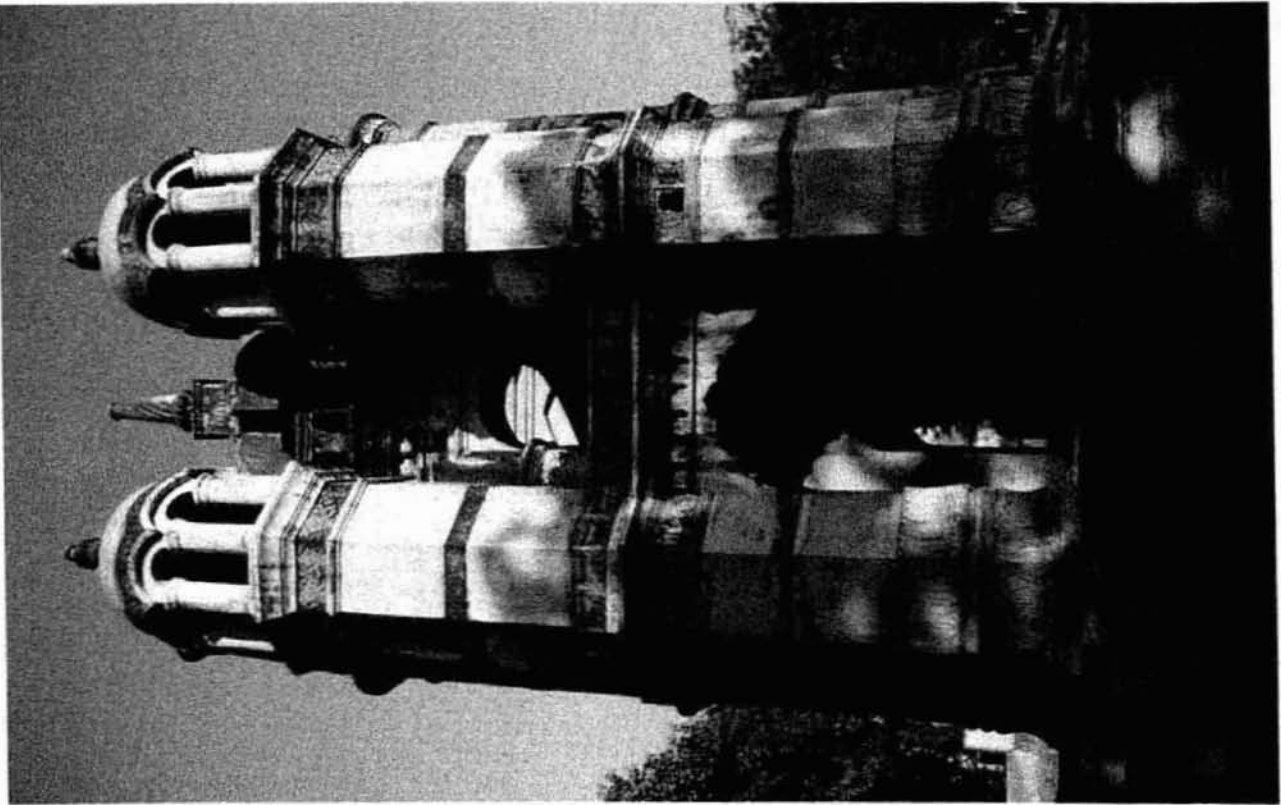


Fig 18. Tomb 10: the west front (facing the main  
road), showing the attached octagonal stair turrets



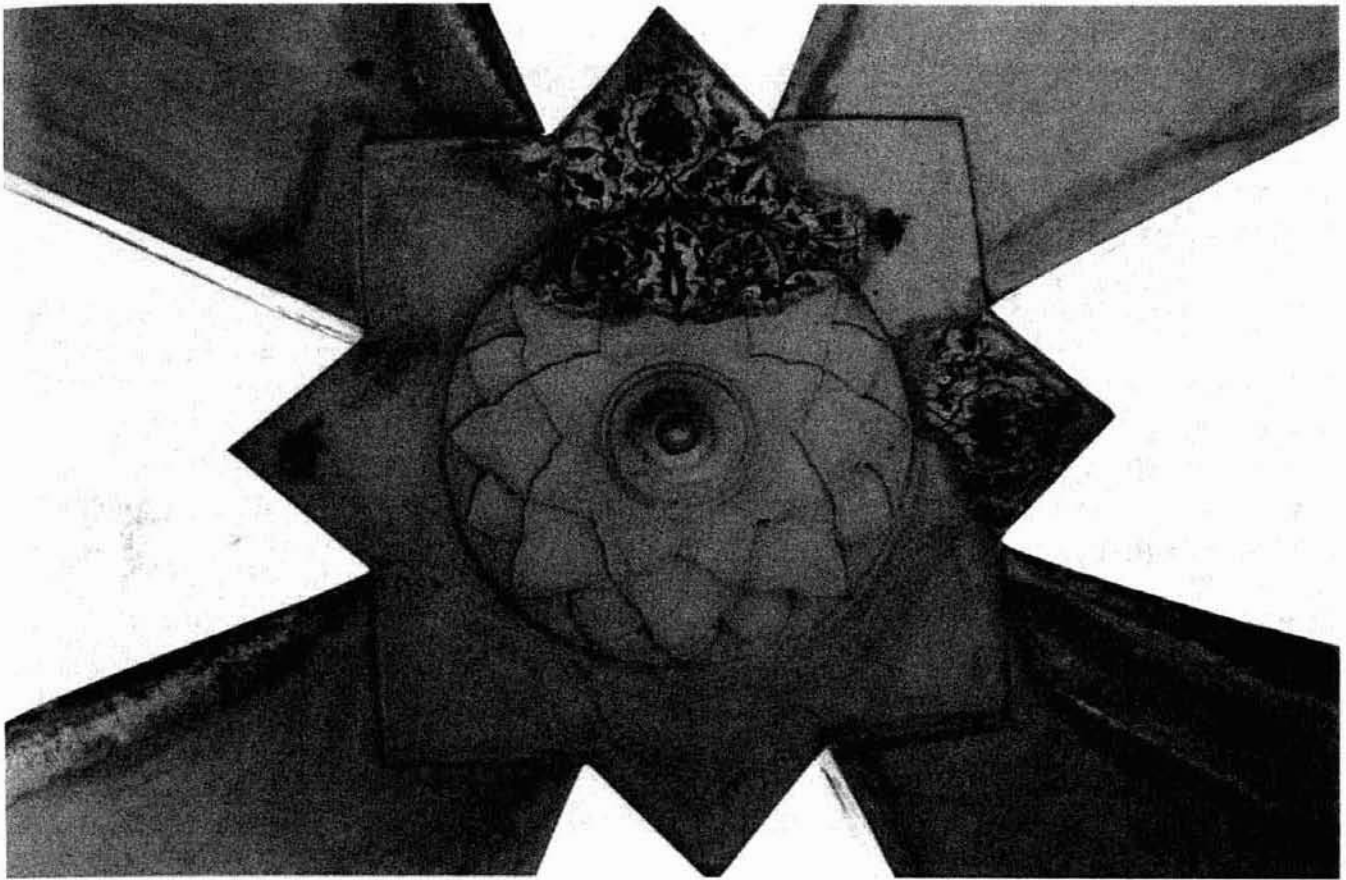


Fig 19. Tomb 10: painted decoration on the underside of the split dome

### Tomb 9

A square pavilion tomb with eight plain circular columns supporting two round-headed openings in each side (fig 15). Above each arched opening is a narrow horizontal recessed decorative panel. There is no trace of a grave slab in the centre of the plinth. The tomb is covered by a ribbed hemispherical hollow dome capped by an obelisk-like finial set diagonally on a pierced square base (fig 16) similar to that of Tomb 7. At each corner is a columnar finial capped by a ribbed dome, a motif used in relief above each of the main columns.

### Tomb 10

A large two-storey tomb on a rectangular plinth with projecting octagonal stair turrets on the western side (figs 17 and 18). At each corner of the structure attached circular columns rise to corner finials. The outer faces of the lower storey have a door with a four-centred pointed arch in the centre flanked by matching niches to either side, and a triple-arched stucco moulding above. Shallow recesses with multi-cusped arches frame each of the niches. A table tomb without an inscription occupies the centre of the ground-floor room. Attached to the eastern side of the structure are two substantial stair turrets. Spiral stairs lead to an empty room at first-floor level with three large round-headed windows on three sides and a balcony, supported by a multi-cusped arch, on the fourth side between the stair turrets. This first-floor room is roofed by a four-segment split dome supporting a central finial springing from a cuboid base.

The underside of the apex of the dome has traces of original painted decoration (fig 19). The spiral stairs continue to the roof of the tomb where a balcony surrounds the dome, with a parapet pierced by round-headed openings. The matching octagonal stair turrets are capped by small domed pavilions with round columns at each angle supporting round-headed arches with a dome and small finial above. An inscribed stone slab in the first-floor room (placed there in 1916) records that this is believed to be the tomb of Gerald Aungier (d 1677).

### Tomb 11

A pavilion tomb generally similar to Tomb 9: a square structure with eight circular columns supporting two arched openings on each side, with a hemispherical dome springing from a solid drum (fig 20). Above each of the column capitals is a dome-style moulding in relief (fig 21). The finial is a tapered fluted column on a pierced base as Tombs 7 and 9 but topped by a small pyramid. There are bands of moulded stucco decoration below the main cornice and around the top of the drum. There are no corner finials. Directly beneath the centre of the dome is a grave oriented east-west, but without any surviving inscription. The square-stepped plinth has a curious plain-sided extension to the west, possibly the base of a now-vanished monument (fig 22); a similar extension to Tomb 16 supports the obelisk memorial to Henry Gary.

### Tomb 12

A pavilion tomb, similar to Tomb 11 but with columns of stacked torus mouldings (figs 23 and 24); there is no extension to the plinth, and the corners of the monument are surmounted by tall slender finials. The dome is not ribbed but springs from a crown of cut-leaf form. The central finial is an obelisk set square on an unpierced base. The table tomb below the centre of the dome has the grave slab of Elizabeth Wyche (d 1736).

### Tomb 13

A tall square tomb with substantial attached octagonal corner columns rising to large octagonal finials above (fig 25). In the centre of each face a four-centred pointed-arched door within a rectangular recessed surround and flanked by a pair of pilasters of banded colonnettes gives access to the interior; those on the north, south and east are essentially ornamental but the western door is provided with steps. The central grave is oriented east-west but has no surviving inscription. Above a horizontal ledge-moulding supported by decorated brackets, the attic storey of the tomb exterior is decorated with square recessed moulded panels of lattice-like ornament, two on each side. Above these again a decorated frieze runs around the monument below the cornice; frieze, panels and ledge-moulding bear traces of red-painted decoration. The hemispherical ribbed dome rises from a polygonal drum bearing ogee dome forms in relief and is surmounted by an elaborate central finial.

### Tomb 14

An octagonal tomb with four-centred pointed-arched doorways and matching blind niches with multi-cusped arches in alternate faces (fig 26). The eastern doorway has an elaborate moulding above, of a type similar to sixteenth-century Mannerist 'grotesque' (fig 27). The



Fig 20. Tomb 11 from the east

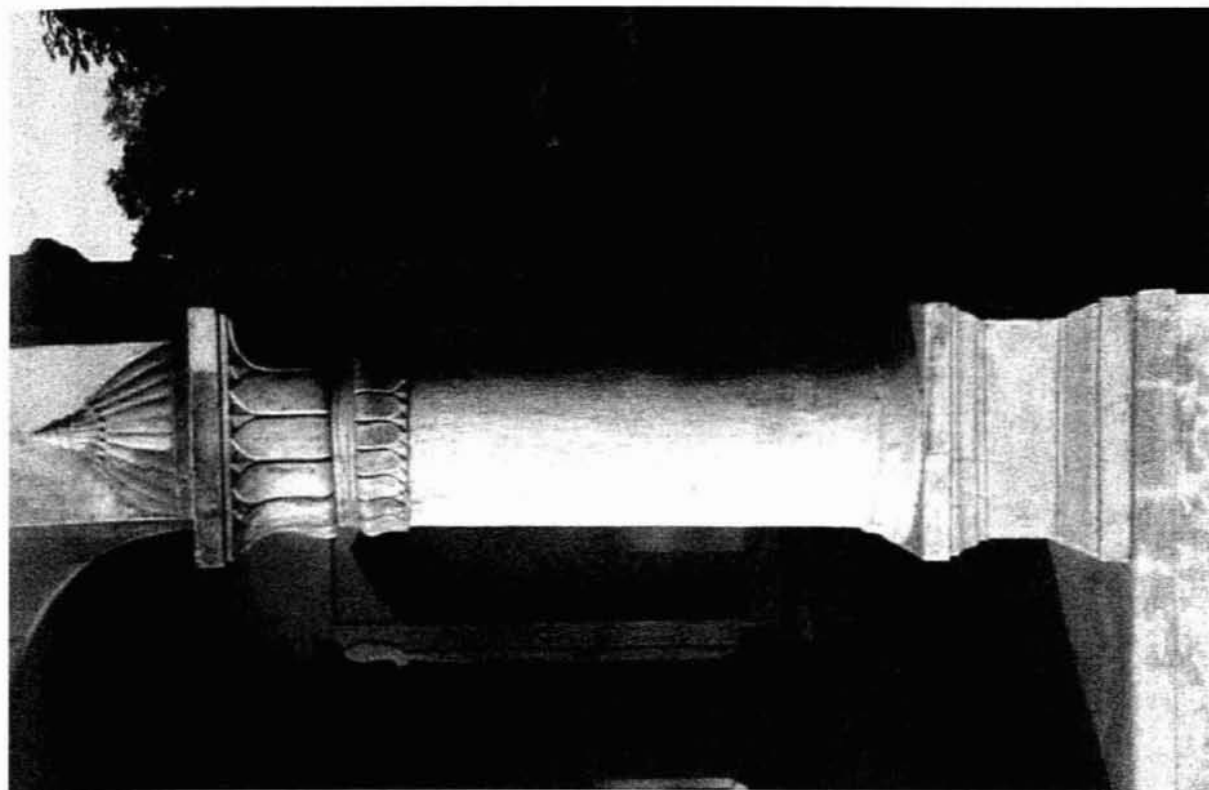


Fig 21. Tomb 11: detail of corner column with capital and dome-style relief moulding above

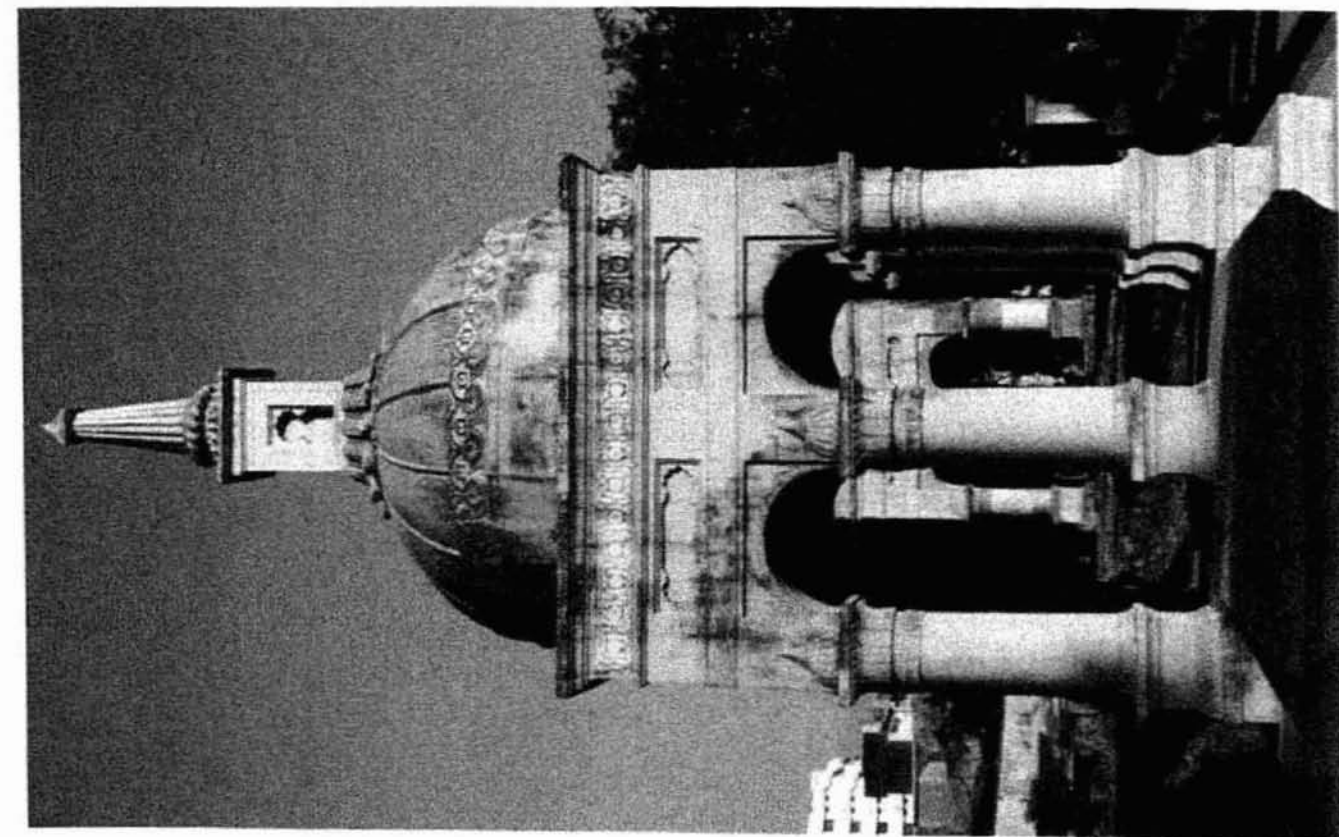


Fig 22. Tomb 11 from the west, showing the plinth extension in the foreground

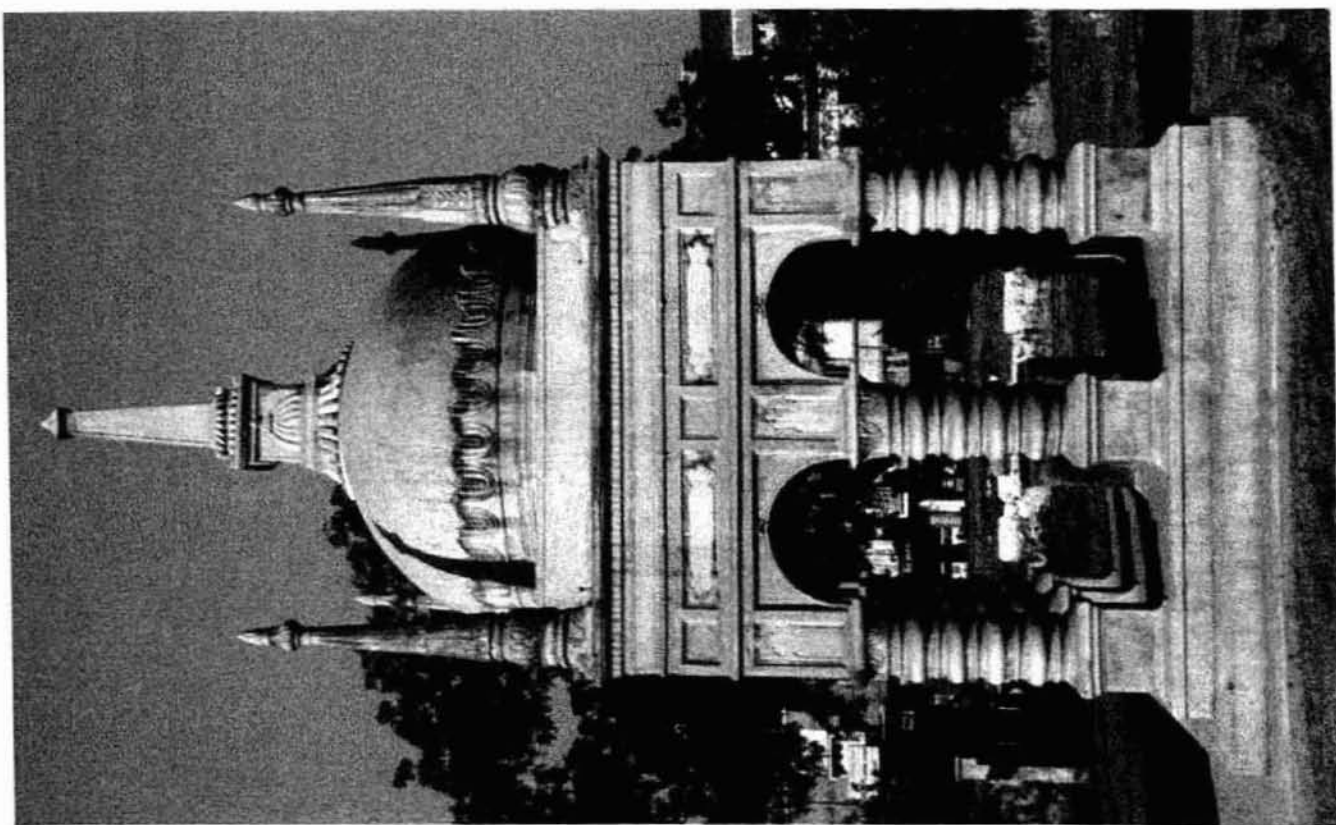


Fig 23. Tomb 12 from the east (Elizabeth Wyche, d 1736)



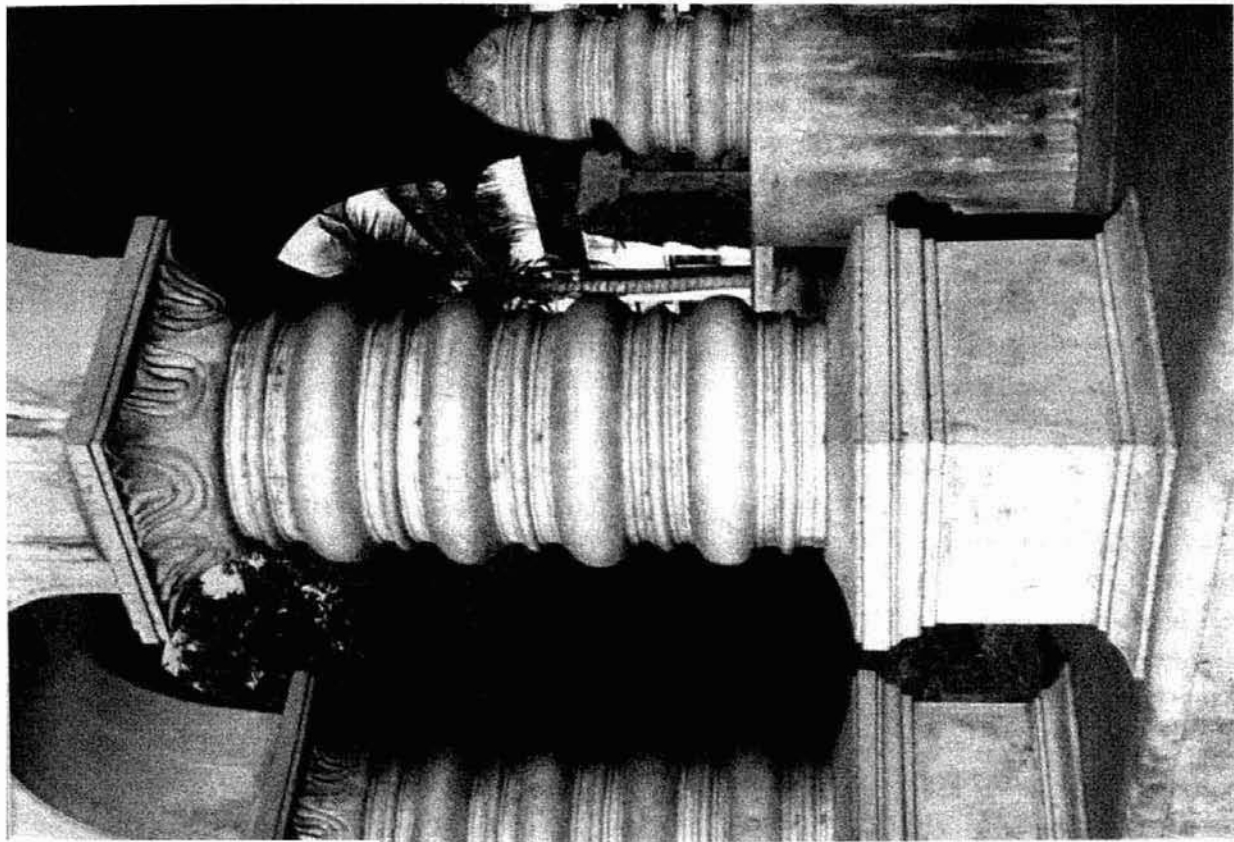


Fig 24. Tomb 12: detail of column with stacked torus mouldings

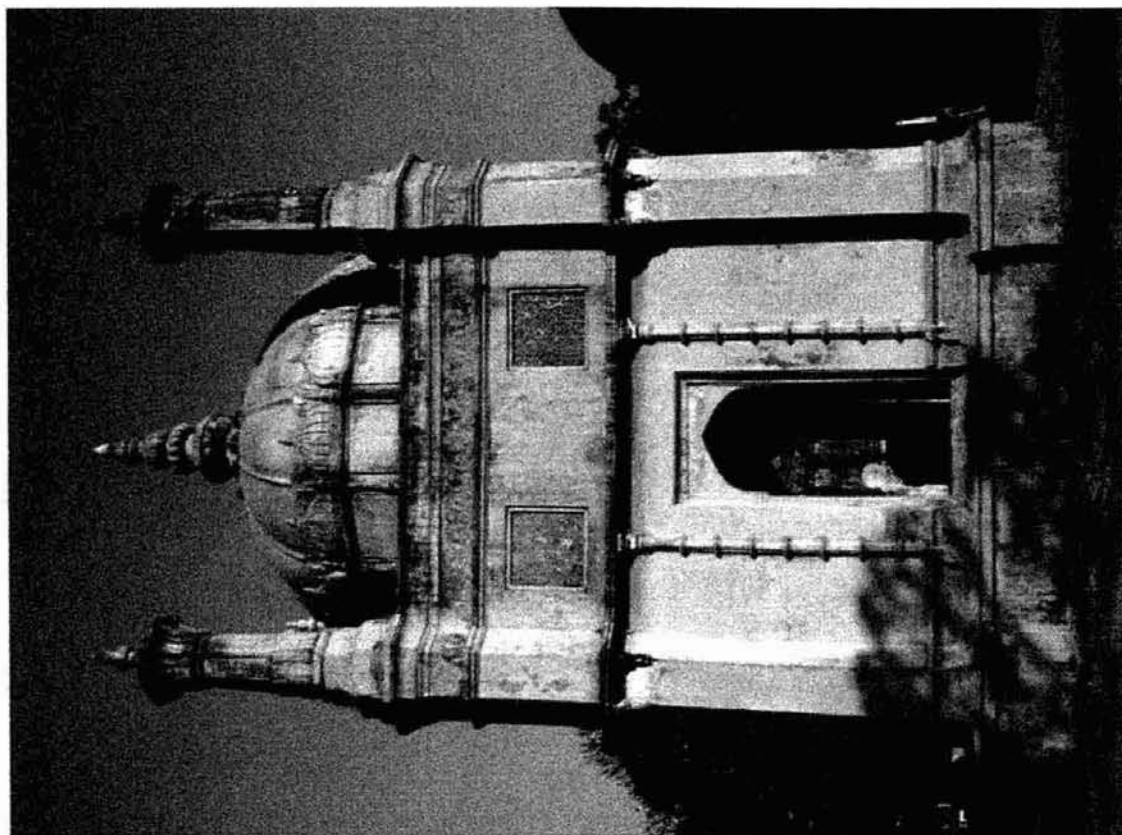


Fig 25. Tomb 13 from the west

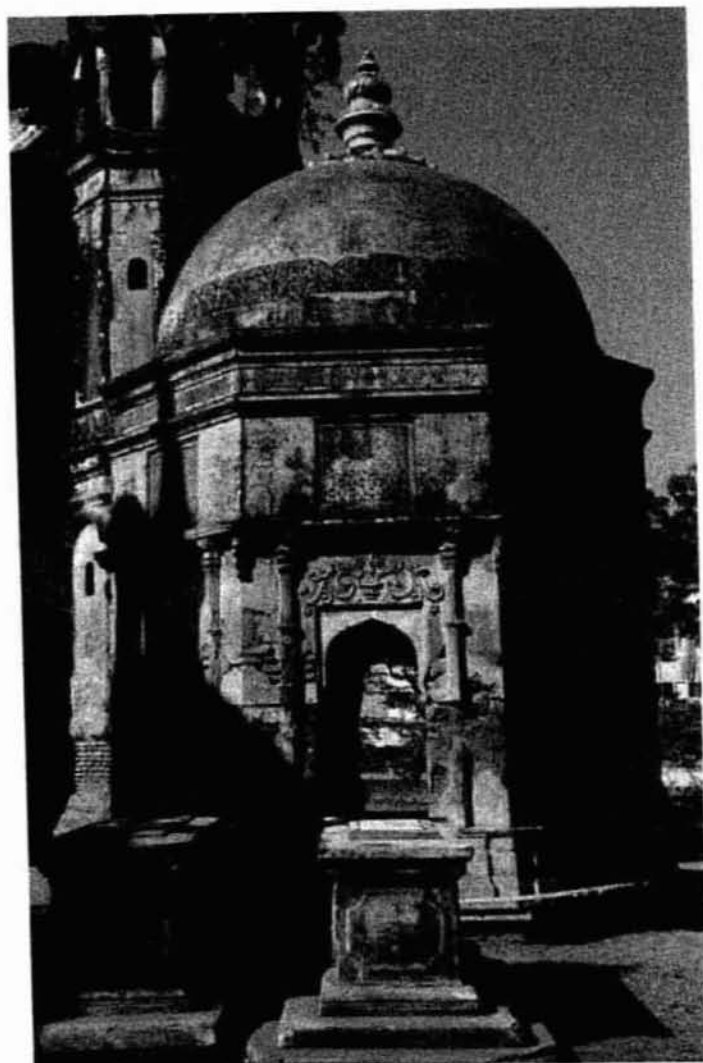


Fig 26. Tomb 14 from the east (Francis Breton, d 1649)

general organization of the decoration is similar to Tomb 13: a prominent ledge-moulding supported by decorated brackets runs around the tomb above the level of the doorways, marking off a low attic storey with square recessed panels with lattice-type patterns on each face. The ledge-moulding has traces of red paint. A further band of moulded decoration runs round the lower part of the dome, which is capped by a finial. An inscribed stone slab on the inner wall face above one of the doorways records this as the tomb of Francis Breton (d 1649).

### Tomb 15

A square pavilion tomb, a larger version of Tombs 9 and 11–12, with twelve rather than eight circular columns supporting three round-arched openings on each face (fig 28). The tomb is roofed by a hemispherical ribbed dome capped by a tall and elaborate central finial. A decorated band runs around the octagonal lower drum of the dome, and a parapet pierced by round-headed openings around the top of the tomb, with a finial at each corner. In the centre of the floor beneath the dome is a grave plinth oriented east–west, with a smaller one on its northern side. A stone plaque inside the tomb above the central arch on the northern side records these as the graves of Bartholomew Harris (d 1694) and his wife, Arabella Harris (d 1686). In the centre of the underside of the dome a circle encloses a black- and red-painted foliate motif.

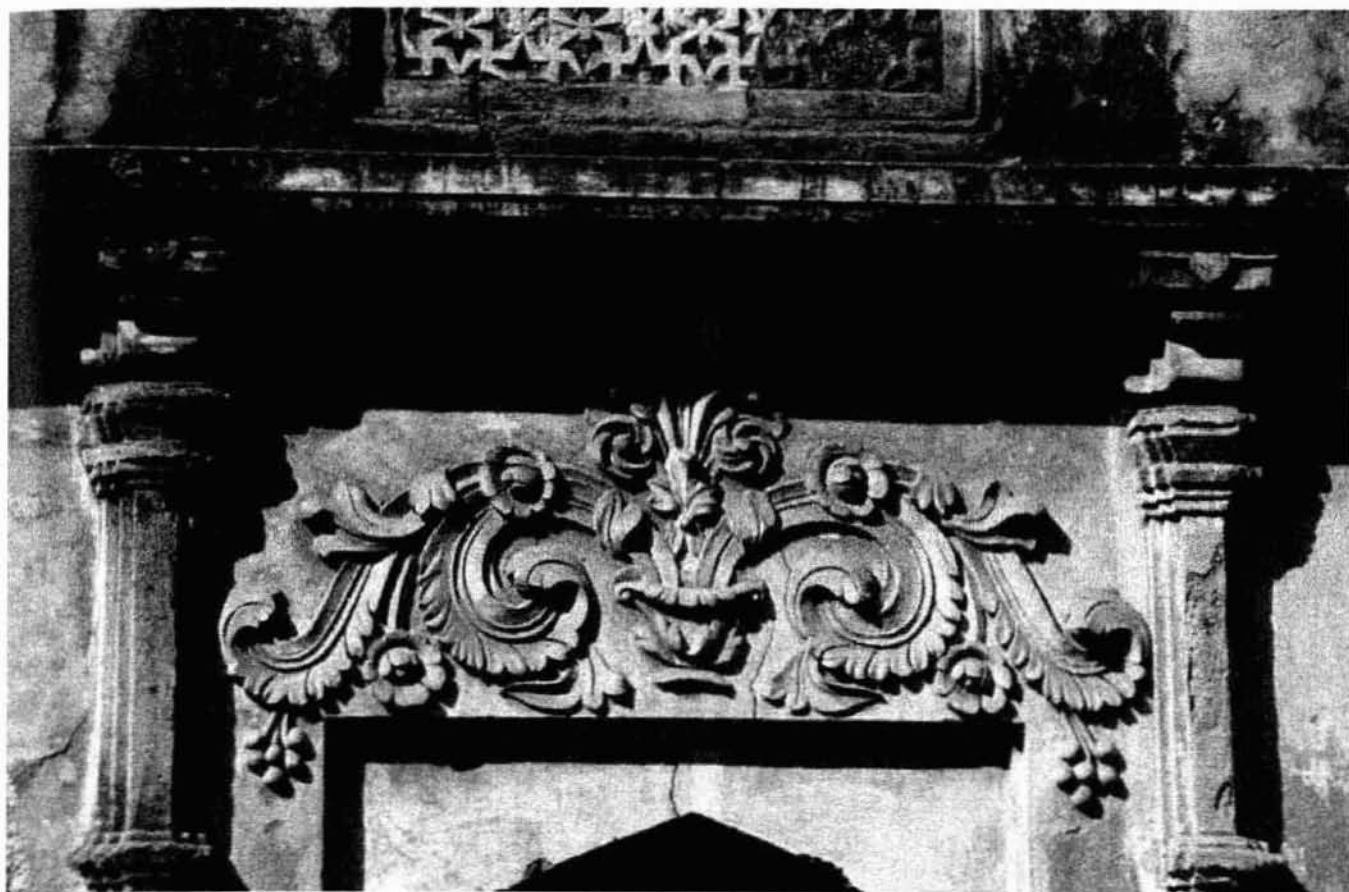


Fig 27. Tomb 14: detail of moulding over the main doorway

An eroded brick plinth attached to the western side of Tomb 15 indicates the site of a further substantial monument that was either never completed or has been entirely destroyed.

### Tomb 16

This consists of a pair of tombs, one entirely enclosed within the other (fig 29). The *inner tomb* is a single-storey rectangular structure with attached rounded columns buttressing each corner. In the centre of each side is an identical four-centred pointed-arched door giving access to the interior where a tomb plinth (oriented east-west) occupies the central floor space, with a second shorter plinth to its south. The *outer tomb* is broadly similar to Tomb 10: a two-storey structure with matching cornices between the ground and upper storeys and immediately below the fenestrated parapet that encircles the top of the tomb. At each corner, moulded column bases with incised floral motifs support clusters of engaged column shafts, which culminate in prominent finials at each corner of the balustrade. The lower storey has a tall four-centred pointed-arched opening in the centre of each side flanked by smaller blind niches to either side with decorative panels above. These are matched by unequal shallow-arched pediment mouldings above. The principal entrance is on the eastern side where steps led up between the projecting octagonal stair turrets to an enclosed narrow ambulatory between the outer and inner tombs. From the eastern side of the ambulatory matching doorways give access to spiral staircases in the stair turrets. The first-floor platform is built around and against the upper structure of the inner tomb, and is lit by three identical pointed-arched openings on the north,

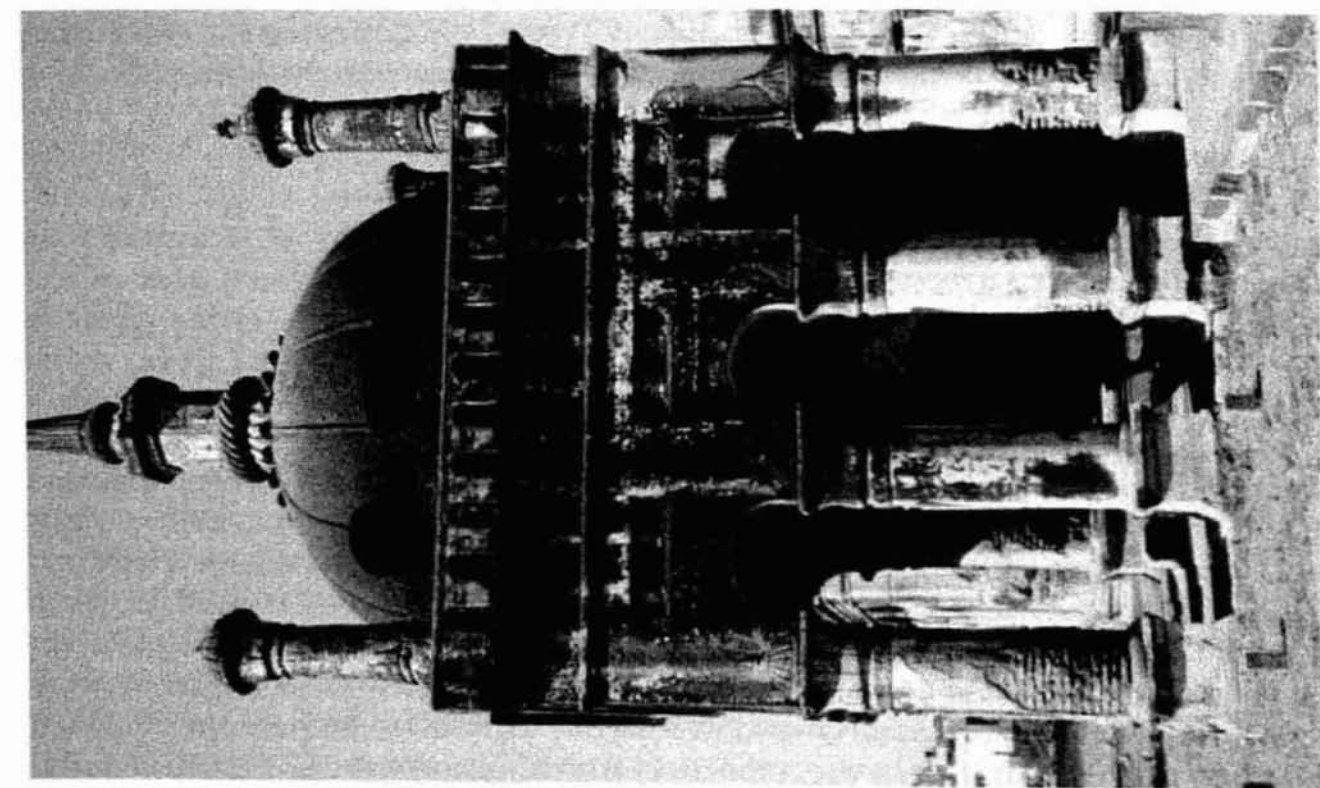


Fig 28. Tomb 15 from the east (Arabella Harris,  
d 1686; Bartholomew Harris, d 1694)

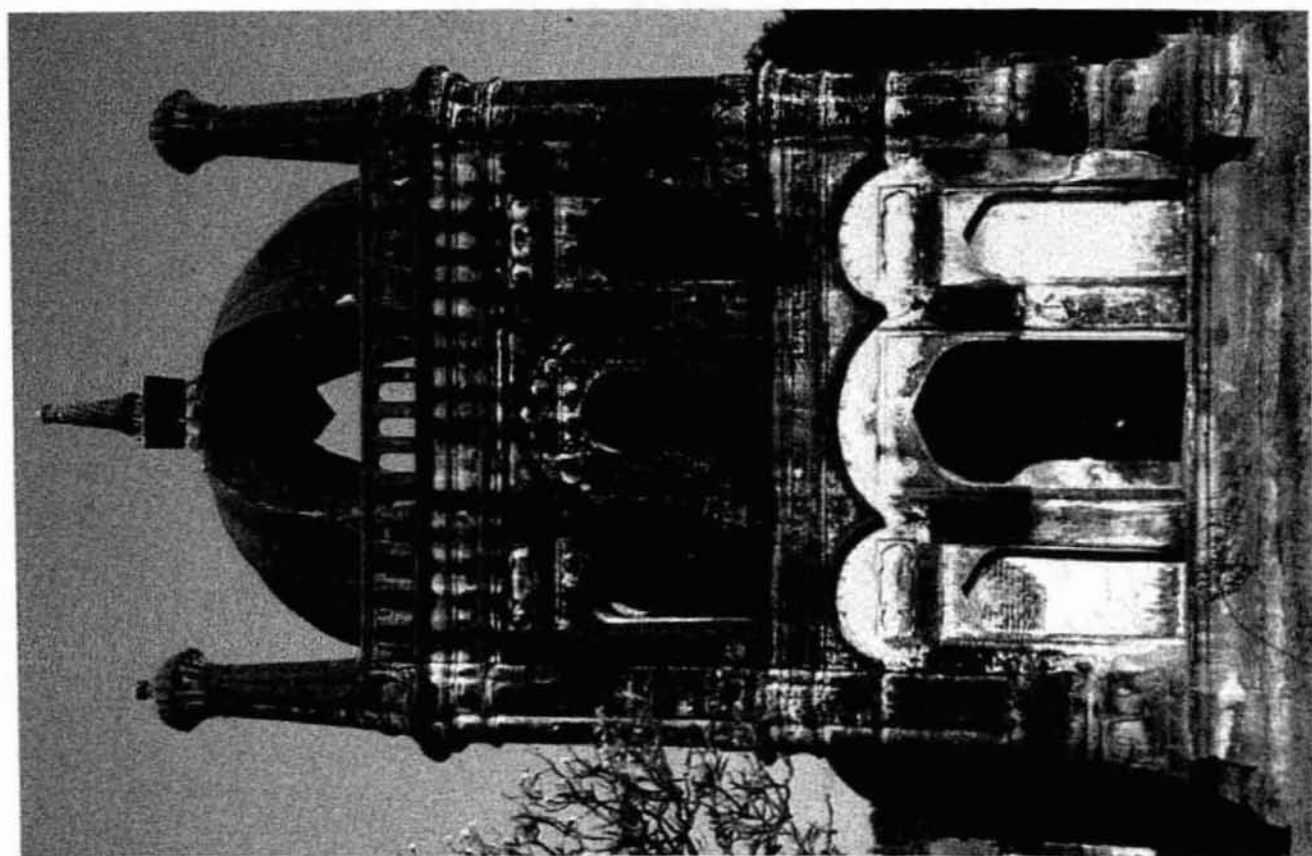


Fig 29. Tomb 16 from the west (George Oxenden,  
d 1669)





Fig 30. Tomb 16A from the east (Henry Gary, d 1658)

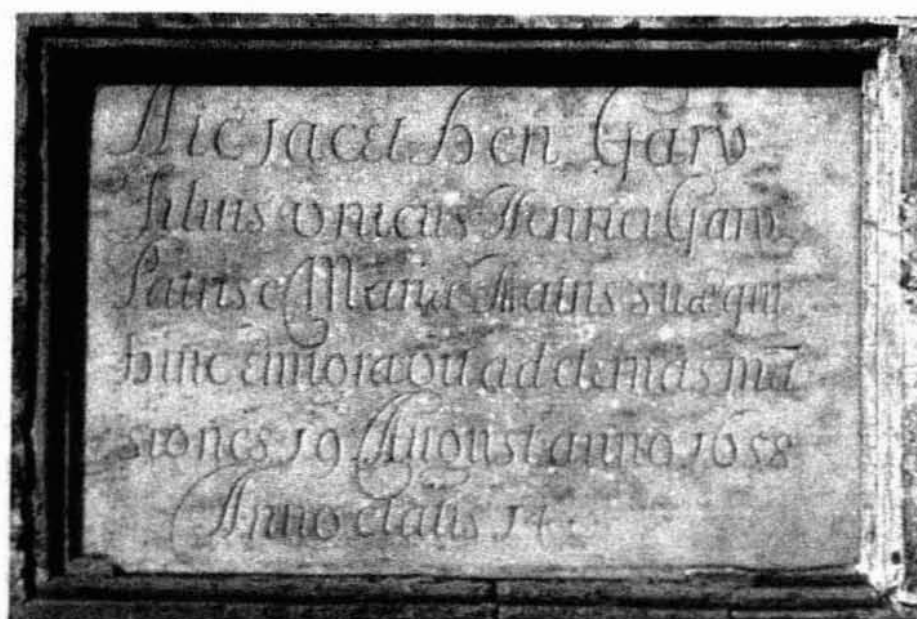


Fig 31. Tomb 16A: inscription on the tomb of Henry Gary, which reads: *Hic jacet hen. Gary filius unicus Henrici Gary patris et Mariae matris suae qui hinc emigravit ad eternas mansiones 19 August anno 1658 Anno aetatis 14* ('Here lies Henry Gary, only son of Henry Gary his father and of his mother Maria who left here for the eternal mansions 19th August 1658 aged 14')

west and south sides, and by a single opening between the stair turrets on the east. In the external elevation the central first-floor opening on each side is framed within a shallow moulded recess topped by a multi-cusped arch. The outer tomb is covered by a four-segment split dome, similar to that of Tomb 10, supporting a central finial with spiralling ribs springing from a cuboid base. The matching octagonal stair turrets are capped by small domed pavilions with rounded columns at each angle supporting round-headed arches with a dome and small finial above. Within the inner tomb above the western door a carved stone plaque records this tomb as the burial place of the brothers Christopher Oxenden (d 1659) and Sir George Oxenden (d 1669), and notes that one tomb is contained within the other.

### Tomb 16A

From the northern side of Tomb 16 a plain stucco plinth 2m wide serves as the foundation for a four-sided obelisk (fig 30). The plain cuboid base has an inscribed stone plaque set into its western side recording this as the grave of Henry Gary who died in 1658 aged 14 years (fig 31). The obelisk above is surmounted by a lotus finial.

## THE CHRONOLOGY OF THE TOMBS

The earliest surviving inscription is that of Tomb 14 (Francis Breton). Breton died on 21 July 1649, and Foster proposes to date the inscription specifically to December 1649 on grounds of its authorship.<sup>24</sup> Although the argument is not conclusive, it would suggest that this and perhaps other monuments were constructed relatively rapidly after the burial of their occupants. It is clear from surviving accounts that the deceased were buried very soon after death, in accordance perhaps with Islamic prescription; among the seventeenth-century presidents of the Surat Factory, Sir George Oxenden (d 1669) and Francis Breton were buried the day after they died;<sup>25</sup> and Nathaniel Wyche (d 1659) two days after he died.<sup>26</sup> Where a monument was intended, sufficient space would need to have been left around the grave; this indicates an element of forward planning which must have begun as soon as the individual died.

Tomb 16 (the Oxenden tomb) appears (on the basis of the inscription and the structure) to be a two-stage monument. It consists of a single-storey domed monument over the grave of Christopher Oxenden (d 1659) later enclosed within a larger two-storey structure associated with the grave of Sir George Oxenden (d 1669). The central grave is thus presumably that of Christopher Oxenden, with George Oxenden's alongside it to the south. A marble slab on the ground floor commemorates Christopher, but the longer inscription on the upper floor explicitly records the two-stage sequence, as well as commemorating George Oxenden.

Christopher Oxenden had been accountant and second in authority to President Nathaniel Wyche according to the Company's instructions of February 1658, with an annual salary of £150.<sup>27</sup> Responsibility for the construction of his tomb (and therefore its date) is unclear. Foster suggests that the Latin inscription for Christopher Oxenden's tomb was composed by Thomas Thomson, who was chaplain to the Surat Factory at the time of Christopher's death.<sup>28</sup> Rawlinson, followed by M S Commissariat, suggests that the inscription was the work of George Oxenden.<sup>29</sup> But George Oxenden was in England at the time of his brother's death (he had left Surat in January 1659;<sup>30</sup> Christopher died on 18 April) and he did not return to take up the presidency at Surat until September 1662.<sup>31</sup> This would imply a delay of more than three years between Christopher Oxenden's death and his tomb inscription, and authorship by

the Surat chaplain is perhaps more probable. There appears no compelling reason to suppose that Christopher Oxenden's tomb was commissioned or built by his brother.

George Oxenden died ten years after his brother, on 26 November 1669. To whom should be ascribed the idea that his tomb be built over and around that of Christopher Oxenden remains to be established, if indeed the relevant documentation still exists. George Oxenden had been ill for several months before his death,<sup>32</sup> and may himself have given directions for his tomb. Foster attributes the monument to his two nephews, Streynsham Master and Henry Oxenden, both of whom were serving at Surat at that time.<sup>33</sup> His executors were, however, his brother, Sir Henry Oxenden, and his brother's son, James,<sup>34</sup> who were resident in England. The precise arrangements for the commissioning, financing and construction of the tomb remain unclear.

Adjacent to the Oxenden tomb, and attached to it by a plinth, is a substantial obelisk (Tomb 16A) bearing an inscription to Henry Gary, who died in 1658 (see fig 31). His father, also Henry Gary, became a leading figure in the affairs of Surat and Bombay in the 1660s, becoming acting governor at Bombay in 1667. His wife Maria is thought to have been Portuguese, and – somewhat unusually for this period – she and his family were living with him in India in 1663.<sup>35</sup> The plinth on which the obelisk stands continues across the lower plinth of the enlarged Oxenden monument. The apparent intention was physically to connect the two monuments, and though the precise reasons for this are unclear, the difference in heights suggests that the plinth probably joined that of Christopher Oxenden's tomb, rather than George Oxenden's. This is entirely consistent with the dates of death, Henry Gary's in August 1658 preceding Christopher Oxenden's in April 1659 by less than a year. Records indicate, however, that Henry Gary senior resigned from the East India Company early in 1657,<sup>36</sup> and may for a while have been financially embarrassed before being re-employed (and appointed a member of the Council) on George Oxenden's arrival as president in 1662.<sup>37</sup> Hence at the time of his son's death he was not employed by the Company, but the physical link between his son's tomb and Christopher Oxenden's suggests continuing close relations. Furthermore, even if the obelisk was raised several years after his son's death, when Henry Gary had become a leading figure in the affairs of the Surat Factory, the location of the grave adjacent to Christopher Oxenden's suggests he remained a person of some standing in the interim.

The Oxenden tomb stands at one end of a row of five monuments on the low crest overlooking the road from the Variav Gate. At the opposite, northern, end of that row is a matching tomb (Tomb 10), of similar external design, though smaller in size and lacking the two-stage structure of the Oxenden tomb. These are the two largest tombs in the English Cemetery, and their striking similarity suggests that they may be of similar date. The northern tomb is generally attributed to Gerald Aungier, president of the Surat Factory 1669–77;<sup>38</sup> an inscription to that effect was placed in the tomb in 1916.<sup>39</sup> The size of the tomb is consistent with that of a wealthy and powerful individual; the style and architecture suggest a date in the 1660s or 1670s, but the only specific evidence for the Aungier attribution comes from Ovington's account of the Surat cemetery in the early 1690s: 'The two most celebrated Fabricks among the *English*, set off with stately Towers and Minorets, are that which was Erected for Sir *John Oxonton* [*sic*], and the other for the Renown'd and Honourable President *Aungers*.'<sup>40</sup>

The next dated tomb for which an inscription survives *in situ* is that of Bartholomew Harris (d 1694) and his wife Arabella, who predeceased him in 1686 (Tomb 15). The two graves are presumably those marked by raised plinths within the monument: the larger central one probably that of Bartholomew Harris, the smaller one immediately to the south of it that of his



wife. Bartholomew Harris was left as agent in charge of the factory at Surat from May 1687 when the president, Sir John Child, departed to take up residence as Governor of Bombay. Harris became president in turn on Child's death in February 1690, but remained at Surat where he died on 10 May 1694. Arabella was only eighteen when she died, and Harris remarried after her death.<sup>41</sup>

The Harris monument poses two particular questions. The first is its date, since the structure covers two graves of individuals who died eight years apart. If we assume that the larger of the plinths is that of Bartholomew Harris, then the fact that this lies centrally within the monument suggests that the monument was built in relation to this, rather than to the earlier and off-centre grave of Arabella. The argument that Harris may have constructed the monument in 1686, leaving the central space free for his own subsequent burial, is at odds with the abundant evidence that East India Company officials intended to return to Britain after having made their fortunes in India. Indeed, some of those presidents who were buried at Surat had already obtained permission to return to England but died before they could do so (notably Francis Breton,<sup>42</sup> George Oxenden<sup>43</sup> and Gerald Aungier<sup>44</sup>). Hence the monument is probably to be dated to 1694 rather than 1686.

A second question concerns its location. The grandiose nature of the Surat tombs indicates that they were intended as statements of power and prestige, and so were designed to be seen. The location of the major tombs of the Oxendens and Aungier on the slight rise overlooking the road north from the Variav Gate is entirely consistent with that aim. The construction of the Gary obelisk between Francis Breton's tomb and the road will have effectively obstructed a clear view of the Breton tomb from the road. This again may indicate the premium placed on visibility, and the desire to impress, so monuments of previous presidents might not be fully respected. The difference in scale between the Breton (1649) and Oxenden (1667) tombs illustrates the gathering impetus of this competitive display, which reached its peak in the final decades of the seventeenth century with the construction of the Aungier and Oxenden tombs in the English Cemetery and the Van Reede monument (1691) in the Dutch Cemetery (fig 32).

We may ask, therefore, why the tomb of Bartholomew Harris was located directly behind the Oxenden monument, beside the Breton tomb and, like the latter, largely hidden from view from the road. That locations were available along the road frontage is suggested by the dated inscription of 1736 on Tomb 12; Tomb 11, from its similar architecture, may also have been built only in the second quarter of the eighteenth century. Why was one of these prime locations not chosen for the Harris monument? We have no direct information as to how the monuments were commissioned or financed, or how the different grave plots were allotted. It is possible, however, that Harris was simply buried alongside his wife Arabella and that it was the location of her 1686 grave that fixed the site of his 1694 monument.

The three tomb monuments along the road frontage of the English Cemetery, Tombs 11, 12 and 13, are bracketed by the grandiose monuments at either end but are significantly smaller in scale. Only one of the three, Tomb 12, has an inscription *in situ*, recording the death of Elizabeth Wyche in 1736. The design of the monument is similar to that of its northern neighbour, Tomb 11, and to Tomb 9 to the east; each consists of a rectangular raised plinth supporting an open-sided pavilion of columns capped by a dome. Tomb 7, towards the rear of the cemetery, is also similar in general conception (a dome supported on columns) but is octagonal rather than rectangular in plan; the comparison is reinforced by the identical form of the central finial on the domes of Tombs 7 and 9: in each case, a plain-sided obelisk placed obliquely (see fig 16). Of this group of four stylistically similar monuments, only Tomb 12 has an inscription, but it may be that all four are to be dated to the first half of the eighteenth



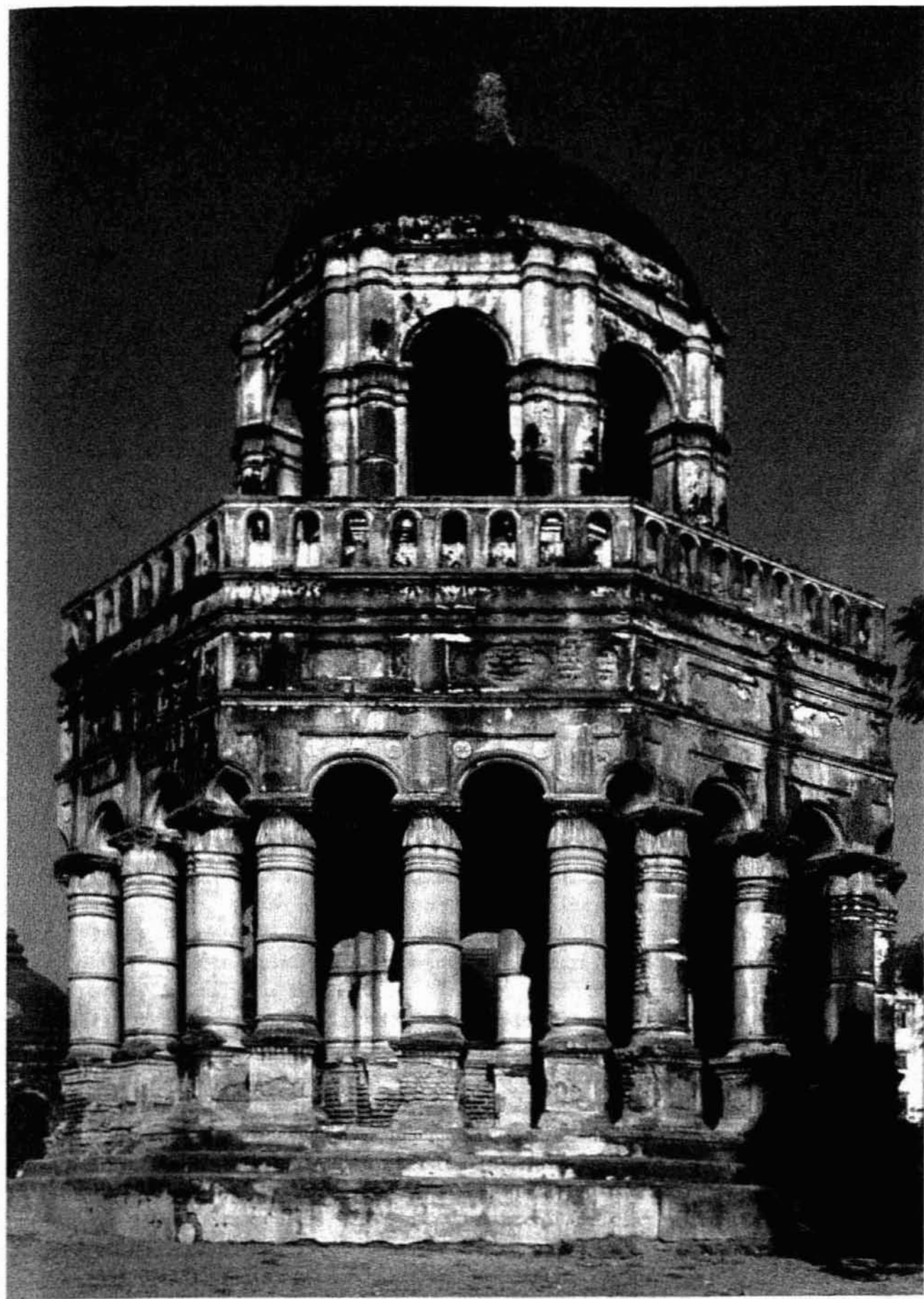


Fig 32. The Dutch Cemetery at Surat: the tomb of Baron Van Reede, d 1691

century. The Harris tomb had already anticipated this design in its colonnaded sides though its dome is supported on square-sectioned pillars rather than columns and its overall conception is altogether heavier.

Tomb 13 appears to be earlier than this, judging from the style of the monument. As we have seen, among the early tombs in the English Cemetery one group stands out by virtue of their 'pavilion' design of columns supporting a dome. Tomb 13 does not belong to this type, but instead resembles the earlier tombs of Aungier and the Oxendens in consisting of a rectangular structure (in this case square) with corner turrets capped by finials and openings (in this case identical pointed-arched openings) in each side. Thus the tomb takes the form essentially of a chamber rather than an open-sided pavilion. Tomb 13 also shares with Francis Breton's tomb the provision of square recessed decorative panels on the upper wall faces. These are the only tombs in this cemetery that display this presumably early feature.

It is possible that Tomb 13 was the burial place of Nathaniel Wyche, president of the Surat Factory 1658–9. 'On 23 May [1659] Wyche died also, "having been sick no more than eight days", and he was buried two days later.'<sup>45</sup> Christopher Oxenden had died only a month earlier, and his tomb and Gary's obelisk, together with the earlier Breton tomb, form a tight cluster of monuments in the south-west corner of the cemetery. The identification is plausible, though – unless further documentary information is available – it must remain conjectural. The design of Tomb 13 would, however, be entirely in accord with a date in the 1650s, 1660s or 1670s; Bartholomew Harris's monument of 1694 already shows a shift towards the pavilion-type design of columns supporting a dome that we have tentatively attributed to the first half of the eighteenth century.

Only one further early tomb remains to be considered: Tomb 6, towards the back of the cemetery. Here again a late seventeenth-century date may be suspected on the basis of its architecture: a square and essentially enclosed building on a plinth, with three latticed windows on each side and a door in the centre of the southern wall (fig 11).

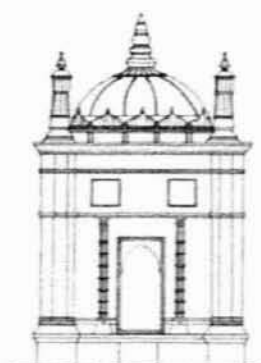
The later tomb monuments in the English Cemetery are not the primary subject of this account. They include the striking trio of matching tombs (Tombs 1–3: see fig 7), each with corner columns supporting arches and covered by a dome; two of the three have inscriptions dating them to 1761 and 1774/5 respectively. There is also a series of three monuments of more purely European style, with a solid core rather than a pavilion or chamber: Tomb 4, which has a square base surmounted by a hipped capping (1803); Tomb 5, with a square base surmounted by a dome (1804); and Tomb 8, with its square base surmounted by an obelisk (1811). Another tomb, adjacent to Tomb 4, which may have been similar to these, survives only as a square brick plinth, without a superstructure.

In a broad sense the earliest tombs in the cemetery may be held to derive from the adoption in India of Timurid tomb forms in the early sixteenth century. Octagonal free-standing mausolea such as the Sabz Burj and Nila Gumbad at Delhi, dating to the 1530s or 1540s, provide obvious parallels in both their general conception and decorative details.<sup>46</sup> The stair turrets of Tombs 10 and 16 resemble the multiple minarets which became fashionable in the reign of Shah Jahan (1628–58), and were typically of circular or octagonal form, supporting a *chhatra* or small domed kiosk.<sup>47</sup> The placing of tombstones on platforms, a feature found in many of the Surat tombs, was also a Mughal tradition. Koch has noted how the curvilinear and florid vocabulary of Shah Jahan's architecture was easily accomplished in cheaper materials such as brick rendered with stucco or plaster, and that this facilitated the spread of Mughal architectural style beyond elite circles. The earlier tombs at Surat bear witness to this process of 'mughalization'.<sup>48</sup>

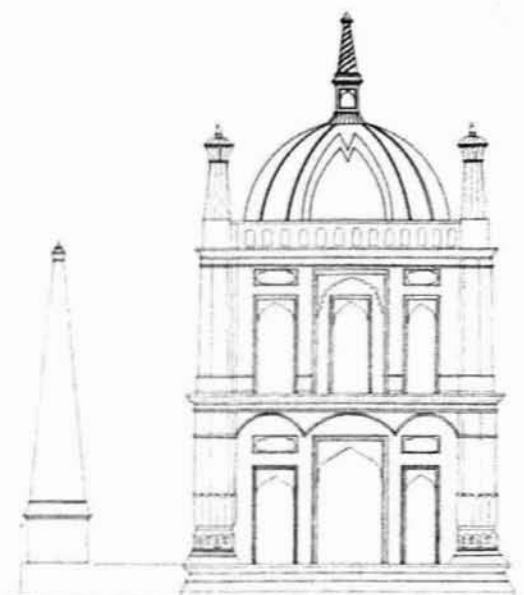
## Series 1



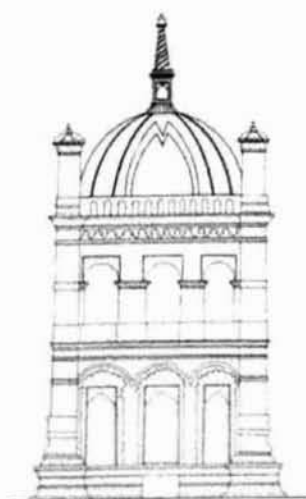
Tomb 14:  
1649



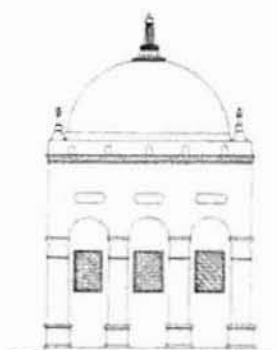
Tomb 13:  
?1659



Tomb 16:  
1669



Tomb 10:  
1677



Tomb 6: ?



Tomb 15:  
1694

Fig 33. The English Cemetery at Surat: the first series of tombs (1649–94)

## Series 2



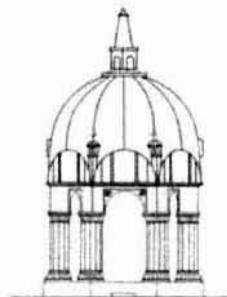
Tomb 11: ?



Tomb 12:  
1736



Tomb 9: ?



Tomb 7: ?

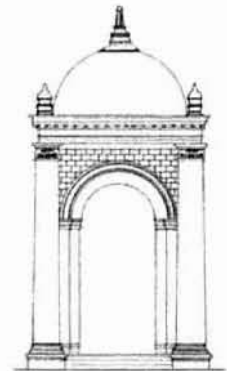
## Series 3



Tomb 2:  
1761



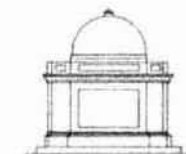
Tomb 1:  
1775



Tomb 3: ?



Tomb 4:  
1803



Tomb 5:  
1804



Tomb 8:  
1811

Fig 34. The English Cemetery at Surat: the second series of tombs (first half of the eighteenth century)

Fig 35. The English Cemetery at Surat: the third series of tombs (1761–1811)





Fig 36. The English Cemetery at Surat: the row of tombs on the western edge of the cemetery, facing the main road leading north from the Variav Gate

Mughal architectural features are particularly prevalent in the tombs of the first series, and this provides further support for the stylistic sequence that is here proposed. Whereas domes and finials are present on fourteen of the sixteen tombs (the exceptions being nos 4 and 8), four-centred pointed-arched openings are only found in Tombs 10, 13, 14 and 16, and three of these (10, 14 and 16) also have multi-cusped arches. None of the tombs in the second series (7, 9, 11 and 12) has either of these features, but instead semicircular arches prevail. By the time the third series of tombs came to be built, beginning in the 1760s, classical features were becoming prominent (most notably in the entablatures of Tombs 1–3) though Indo-Islamic domes were still employed.

In conclusion, the monuments of the English Cemetery can be divided into three groups on the basis of dated inscriptions or, where none is present, their style: an early group (first series), comprising Tombs 6, 10 and 13–16, essentially Indo-Islamic in their architecture, with features characteristic of seventeenth-century Mughal architecture and dated inscriptions still *in situ* spanning the period 1649 (Francis Breton) to 1694 (Bartholomew Harris); a second series of pavilion tombs (7, 9, 11 and 12) with Indo-Islamic elements dominant albeit in a hybrid, idiosyncratic idiom, the sole surviving *in situ* inscription (Elizabeth Wyche, 1736) suggesting an early eighteenth-century date for this series; and a third series (Tombs 1–5 and 8) in which classical European elements are increasingly dominant, ranging in date from 1761 (the earliest of a trio of matching tombs at the back of the cemetery) to 1811 (William Forbes). The stylistic division into these three series is illustrated in figures 33 to 35.

The difference between these later tombs and the two earlier series may be related to the altered political status of the British at Surat following their capture of Surat Castle in 1759.<sup>49</sup>

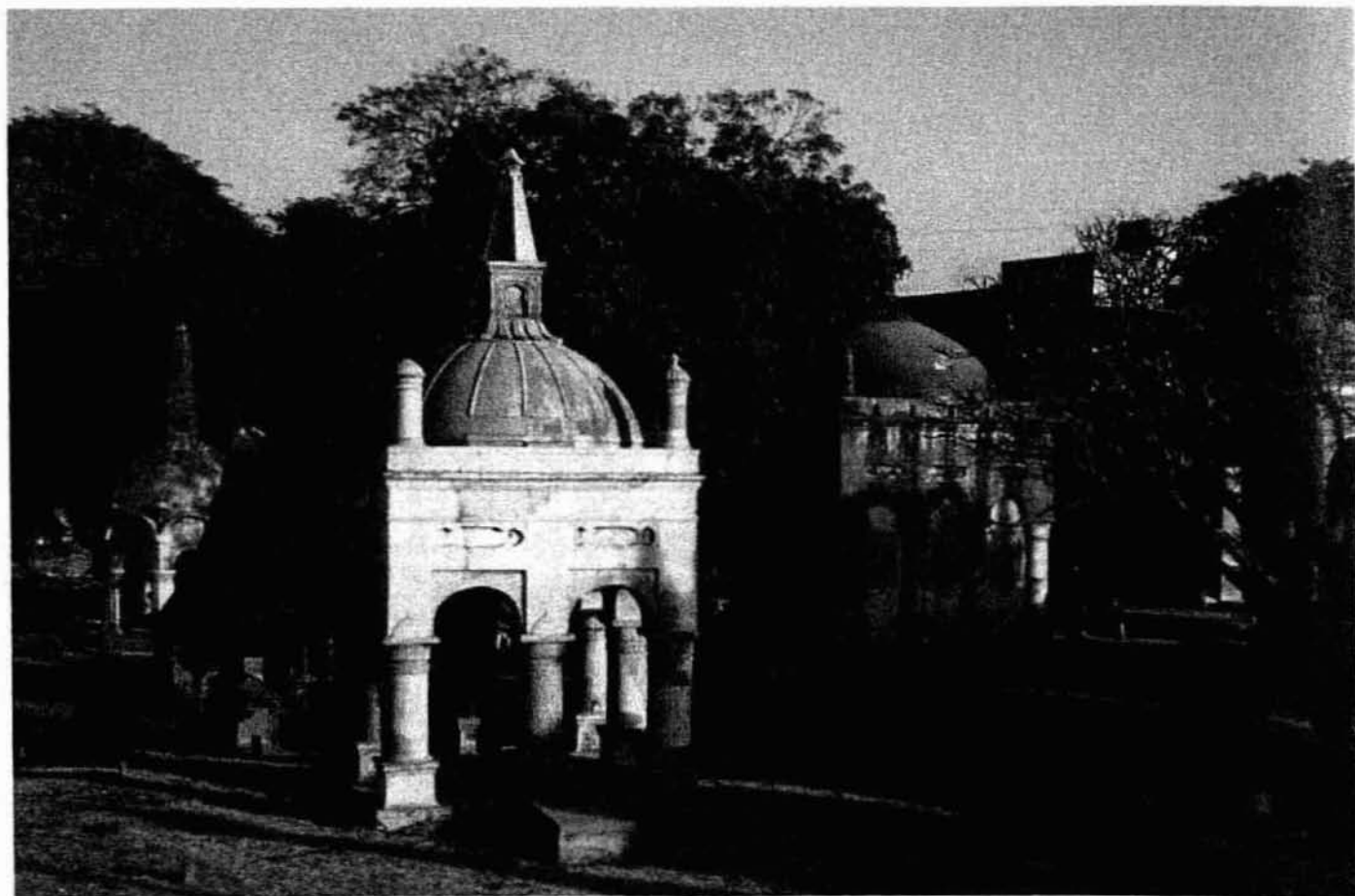


Fig 37. The English Cemetery at Surat: the eastern (rear) sector of the cemetery

This inaugurated a period of forty years of joint rule between the British and the Mughal governor. It is clear that after 1759 European influence became much more pronounced in the design of the cemetery monuments, but they still eschewed visible Christian imagery and retained elements of Indo-Islamic style.

In terms of cemetery plan, the three series of tombs are distinguished by their locations: a majority of the early tombs (series 1 and 2) cluster along the ridge top overlooking the main road leading northwards from the Variav gate at Surat (fig 36); the later tombs (series 3) apparently placed less of a premium on outward display and are grouped towards the back of the cemetery, away from the road edge. The latter was, of course, well nigh full at this stage, without room for additional monuments of any size, but the leaving empty of the central space of the cemetery may both imply a desire that the new monuments be neither too crowded nor overshadowed by the earlier tombs, and indicate a shift in the active focus of the cemetery from the mid-eighteenth century onwards (fig 37).

#### WHO WAS BURIED IN THE TOMBS?

The definite attribution of the tombs to individuals is possible only in a minority of cases.<sup>50</sup> As early as 1862, many of the original inscriptions were missing: 'many of the marble tablets have been stolen, and used by the natives to grind curry powder for their daily repast'.<sup>51</sup> Bellasis also

Table 1. Presidents and Chiefs of the English Factory at Surat, 1613-1708

Thomas Aldworth	1613-15	Died and buried near Ahmedabad, October 1615
Thomas Kerridge	1616-21, 1625-8	Returned to England; died 1657
Thomas Rastell	1621-5, 1630-1	Died at Surat, 7 November 1631
Richard Wylde	1628-30	Resigned and returned to England
John Skibbow	1630 (April-Sept)	Died on return voyage, 3 October 1632
Joseph Hopkinson	1631-3	Died at Surat, November/December 1633
William Methwold	1633-8	Returned to England
William Fremlin	1639-44	Returned to England but died soon after arrival
<b>Francis Breton</b>	1644-9	<b>Died at Surat, 21 July 1649; Tomb 14</b>
Thomas Merry	1649-52	Returned to England; died 1655
Jeremy Blackman	1652-5	Returned to England; died 1658
Edward Pearce	1655-6	Returned to England; died 1682/3
John Spiller	1656-7	Returned to England; died 1677
Henry Revington	1657-8	Transferred to Bijapur; died penniless at Surat, 1661
<b>Nathaniel Wyche</b>	1658-9	<b>Died at Surat, 23 May 1659; ?Tomb 13</b>
Matthew Andrews	1659-61	Returned to England; died 1711
<b>George Oxenden</b>	1662-9	<b>Died at Surat, 14 July 1669; Tomb 16</b>
<b>Gerald Aungier</b>	1669-77	<b>Died at Surat, 30 June 1677; Tomb 10</b>
Thomas Rolt	1678-82	Returned to England; died 1710
John Child	1682-90	Died and buried at Bombay, February 1690
<b>Bartholomew Harris</b>	1690-4	<b>Died at Surat, 10 May 1694; Tomb 15</b>
Samuel Annesley	1694-9	Dismissed 1699; died at Surat, 1732
<b>Stephen Colt</b>	1699-1708	<b>Died at Surat, 1708; Tomb unknown</b>

Names given in bold are those presidents known or believed to be buried in the English Cemetery at Surat

Sources: Foster 1906-27, with continuation by Fawcett (1936 and 1954); supplemented by Wright 1918 and Commissariat 1980

remarks on the 'tomb of considerable pretension, supposed to be that of Gerald Aungier, but it has no inscription'.<sup>52</sup> Sixty years later, there was little more to add: 'A large structure, without any distinguishing mark, is supposed to be the resting-place of the great Gerald Aungier.'<sup>53</sup> The uncertainty is reflected in the inscription placed on the upper floor early in the last century: 'This monument is believed to be the tomb of Gerald Aungier, President of Surat and Governor of Bombay died 30th June 1677. Tablet erected 1916'. The strongest support for the identification is provided by John Ovington's description, based on his time at Surat in the 1690s, where he singles out the Oxenden and Aungier tombs as the 'two most celebrated Fabricks among the *English*, set off with stately Towers and Minorets'.<sup>54</sup>

Eleven of the seventeen surviving monumental tombs in the English Cemetery have identifying inscriptions. To these may be added the customary attribution of Tomb 10 to Aungier and the proposal set out above that Tomb 13 might be the tomb of Nathaniel Wyche. If we compare these attributions with the known sequence of presidents of the Surat Factory (table 1), it emerges that all those from 1649 (Francis Breton) to 1694 (Bartholomew Harris) who died at Surat were provided with a monument (provided we accept that no. 13 is indeed the tomb of Nathaniel Wyche). Bellasis also records an inscription marking the grave of Stephen Colt, president 1699-1709.<sup>55</sup> No such tomb is mentioned either by Rawlinson or by Commissariat so the inscription may subsequently have been lost or removed. The possibility that Colt was buried beneath one of the unattributed monuments, 11, 9, 7, or even 6, cannot be confirmed.



Only one of the earlier presidents died at Bombay, and it is significant that he too was provided with an impressive burial monument. Sir John Child (president 1682–90) left Surat in May 1687 to become the first East India Company president to reside at Bombay. He died on 4 February 1690 and was buried at Lower Colaba. Commissariat remarks that his tomb was

long conspicuous because of its size, which made it a prominent landmark for mariners entering the harbour. This lofty tomb appears to have been subsequently destroyed, some time in the eighteenth century, probably for military reasons, and thus Bombay has lost what would undoubtedly have been one of its earliest historical monuments.<sup>56</sup>

Though the tomb has been destroyed, we can appreciate its resemblance to the Surat monuments from an eyewitness account by John Burnell, written in 1710:

Likewise it is honoured with the sepulchre of Sir John Child, which is large and spacious, being a mark for the Sunken Rock on the backside. 'Tis a twisting staircase which runs up to its top where through an arch'd door you enter the balcony, where you have a charming prospect of Bombay, Mendon's Point, and the ships sailing in the offing. The Tomb is well contrived and is not only an ornament to the place but benefit both by night and day, for over an arch'd window on the twisting staircase is an iron ring bolt for a beacon to be hoisted as a notice to ships that they may not fall foul of the back of the reef, but be careful by its light to direct their course into a safe harbour.<sup>57</sup>

Commissariat notes the apparent absence of a memorial inscription,<sup>58</sup> a somewhat perplexing feature but apparently also true of Aungier's tomb at Surat.

This leaves only one of the Surat presidents of the period 1649–1707 unaccounted for. Samuel Annesley was appointed president in succession to Harris in 1694, but was dismissed five years later after problems with the Mughal authorities and friction with the New East India Company, which had been established by Act of Parliament in 1698. (The 'New' and 'Old' Companies were eventually merged in 1707.) Annesley continued to operate as a private trader and died at Surat in straitened circumstances in 1732.<sup>59</sup> He is unlikely to have left a monumental tomb, though he did bury two of his infant children in the English Cemetery, in a modest grave with an inscribed slab that still survives.

We may thus conclude that from 1649 it became standard practice for the early presidents of the Surat Factory who died in office to be provided with a monumental tomb. It is also clear that such structures were not reserved only for presidents but were built for other leading officials or even (in the case of Henry Gary) for their offspring. As the status of the Surat Factory declined in the eighteenth century, the sequence was broken, as the centre of East India Company operations in western India was relocated to Bombay.

### THE SURAT TOMBS AND EUROPEAN CEMETERIES

Several early European travellers to Surat wrote accounts of their voyages and our knowledge of seventeenth-century Surat is heavily indebted to the observations of men such as John Fryer, John Ovington and Jean de Thévenot. It is clear from these accounts that the tombs in the English and Dutch cemeteries were among the highlights of Surat. Thévenot, who arrived at Surat in 1666, wrote: *Les Anglois et les Hollandois affectent d'orner leurs Sepultures de pyramides de brique, revêtues de chaux; et comme j'y étois, on en batissoit une pour un Commandant*



*Hollandois, qui devoit coûter huit mille francs* ('The English and the Dutch presume to decorate their tombs with brick pyramids faced with lime and while I was there one was built for a Dutch president which must have cost 8000 francs').<sup>60</sup>

Rivalry between the English and Dutch cemeteries is apparent from these early descriptions: 'The Ground the English Dead are inhumed in, is stocked not with so many Tombs as the Dutch; though in one of Sir George Oxendine's it excels the Proudest.'<sup>61</sup>

John Ovington, who spent over two years as chaplain at Surat (September 1690–February 1693), writes in similar terms:

The *English* and all the *Europeans* are privileg'd with convenient Repositories for their Dead, within half a Mile of the City. There they endeavour to outvie each other in magnificent Structures and stately Monuments, whose large Extent, beautiful Architecture and aspiring Heads, make them visible at a remote distance, lovely Objects of the sight, and give them the Title of the Principal Ornaments and Magnificencies about the City.<sup>62</sup>

Despite the jocular tone of this account, other European travellers who visited the Surat cemeteries were clearly impressed by their architecture and conception. One such was John Vanbrugh, who before embarking on his architectural career spent over a year at Surat (late 1683–early 1685) as a factor in the Company's employ. Vanbrugh drew on his memories of Surat when in 1711 he proposed the establishment of new cemeteries in fields around the edge of London, divorced from the traditional churchyards, to meet the needs of the growing population of the city. Vanbrugh supported his proposal with a sketch 'loosely based on Surat's cemetery'<sup>63</sup> alongside which he wrote: 'This manner of Interment has been practic'd by the English at Suratt and is come at last to have this kind of effect.'<sup>64</sup>

Vanbrugh's reference to Surat highlights the possible connection between Indian cemeteries and mausolea and the development of British funerary architecture in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The tombs of the Dutch and English cemeteries at Surat were derived from local models, including such famous Mughal tombs as the Taj Mahal at Agra or the Gol Gumbaz at Bijapur. These large free-standing tombs would have had a striking impact on British travellers unused to the concept of tomb monuments outside the context of churches and churchyards. As Curl remarks, 'free-standing tombs of great size not in churches had been almost unknown in Europe since Roman times, and so the novelty must have been most attractive to men like the Oxindens [*sic*].'<sup>65</sup> In 1711, the date of Vanbrugh's proposal, there were no free-standing mausolea in unconsecrated ground in Britain – though there were a handful directly associated with churches. Williams has suggested that the now-demolished pavilion that Vanbrugh built for the Duke of Newcastle in the grounds at Claremont, Surrey, may have been intended as a mausoleum,<sup>66</sup> while the greatest of the British parkland mausolea was that designed by Nicholas Hawksmoor and built at Castle Howard in 1728–44. The architecture of these early British mausolea is, however, predominantly classical. Thus while the concept of the parkland mausoleum may have been inspired by Indian models, the tombs themselves were built in a strictly Western tradition.

Whether the Surat cemeteries played a significant role in the establishment of new cemeteries in Britain outside the confines of churchyards is also debatable. The growth of European cities during the eighteenth century had made continued churchyard burial both impracticable and unhygienic. A cemetery was laid out on Calton Hill, Edinburgh, in 1718; Père-Lachaise, in Paris, was founded in 1804; the Glasgow necropolis was founded in 1832.<sup>67</sup> Yet the monuments within these cemeteries were built in the classical tradition, and the contribution of Surat or

other Indian models to these developments may not have been significant. Considerations of space, health and public amenity were probably the guiding principles.

### THE SURAT TOMBS AND THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE RAJ

Between 1700 and 1850 European (more specifically British) attitudes to these tombs underwent a profound change. What Sir John Vanbrugh had set forth as a model for London cemetery design were belittled as 'bad imitations' of Indo-Islamic architecture.<sup>68</sup> The motives of the builders were dismissed as mere vainglory on the part of men engaged in commerce, and only limited allowances were made for the monuments of Sir George Oxenden (but not his brother) and Sir Gerald Aungier, who distinguished themselves in the eyes of later generations by withstanding the Maratha attacks on Surat in 1664 and 1670, and by playing a leading part in the foundation of Bombay. With these exceptions, and despite strongly partisan accounts of early British activities in western India,<sup>69</sup> there is little sense that the individuals buried in these tombs were held in particular esteem by later generations of English settlers, and it is remarkable that the tombs had already fallen into disrepair by the middle of the nineteenth century.

Especially condemnatory is an anonymous article published in the *Calcutta Review* in 1848. It describes the architecture of the Surat tombs as 'a kind of arabesque style, being clumsy imitations of Moorish mausoleums' and criticizes the apparent vainglory of the builders:

When contemplating such an edifice as this, our thoughts are led to some mighty and wealthy viceroy, and we may form magnificent ideas of the departed as a founder of our empire in the East. And yet what was the position of a man over whose remains such a mass of brick and mortar was raised? Will the spectator believe that his salary was £300, 'with a gratuity of £200 *per annum*, as compensation for private trade'?<sup>70</sup>

A few years later we find similar sentiments expressed by Philip Anderson, chaplain in the diocese of Bombay. Of the Oxenden monument he writes: 'The body of an Indian Viceroy might have found here a worthy resting place; it is far too superb for the Chief of a Factory, and his brother who was only a subordinate.'<sup>71</sup>

The similarity between phrases and sentiments in the two accounts strongly suggests that both were by the hand of Philip Anderson (a conclusion generally shared).<sup>72</sup> The criticism draws from a number of sources, including the author's Christian convictions; in his view, the money would have been better spent on churches than on tombs.<sup>73</sup> Such a charge fails to understand the circumstances of British factors living at Surat in the seventeenth century, where even the erection of a weather vane (mistaken for a cross) outside their building was sufficient to provoke a riot;<sup>74</sup> nor is it entirely just, since Aungier left plans and a substantial legacy for a cathedral at Bombay before his death in 1677.<sup>75</sup>

But it is clear that alongside the Christian religious rhetoric there was also disapproval of commerce and a criticism, not of Indo-Islamic architecture in itself, but of the 'bastardized' style these monuments were considered to represent. Anderson's critique is outspoken but not entirely without echoes in other nineteenth- and early twentieth-century accounts. Thus Bellasis in 1862 referred to the Oxenden tomb as 'among the most pompous mausoleums in the English cemetery', and for Rawlinson, writing some sixty years later, 'these cumbersome erections, with their mixture of Oriental and European architecture, seem quaint rather than imposing'.<sup>76</sup>

These changing attitudes to the Surat tombs must be placed within the context of the growing British power and influence in India. Before the development of Bombay in the 1670s, the East India Company was only one of several trading communities operating within the Mughal Empire. Clive's victory at Plassey in 1757 established British political and military dominance in Bengal, and from Calcutta, Madras and Bombay British control expanded steadily to encompass the whole of the subcontinent. The buildings associated with this new-found power at first generally adopted Baroque classical models (for Fort St George, 1760, and the Banqueting Hall, 1802, at Madras) until this was overtaken by Doric neo-classicism in the early nineteenth century (Calcutta Town Hall, 1807-13; the Calcutta mint, 1824-31; and Bombay Town Hall, 1833). Nothing was built by the British in India at this period to rival the flamboyant and eclectic Royal Pavilion at Brighton (1815), though Indian forms had 'little influence on building outside the immediate environs of Brighton'.<sup>77</sup>

The rejection of indigenous architectural forms for British buildings in India during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries is in marked contrast to the styles adopted for the earlier Surat tombs. Works such as James Fergusson's *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture* (1876) indicate the low esteem in which Hindu architecture was held during most of the nineteenth century. 'Indian Saracenic' architecture was better, but still not equal to that of the Christian West.<sup>78</sup> There were those who argued that 'as our administration exhibits European justice, order, law, energy and honour – and that in no hesitating or feeble way – so our buildings ought to hold up a high standard of European art'.<sup>79</sup> Yet during the final decades of the nineteenth century a new style of Indo-Saracenic architecture was adopted by the Raj for major buildings, notably Mayo College at Ajmer (completed in 1885), only for this to be succeeded in turn by Lutyens's oriental classicism in the purpose-built capital of New Delhi, 'assimilating Indic forms, rigorously controlled and subordinated, within a European classical idiom to create an architecture expressive of the ideals of the British Empire'.<sup>80</sup>

Thus the Surat tombs represent the first stage in a shifting dialogue between British residents and indigenous Indian architecture. In this first stage, the British tomb-builders adopted local forms, and were essentially assimilated by the Mughal architectural tradition. Once in power, British colonial rulers rejected these local forms in favour of European classical styles, only returning to Indian forms in the late nineteenth century when they sought to develop a hybrid or composite architecture that was considered especially appropriate to their new imperial vision.

#### THE PURPOSE AND MESSAGE OF THE TOMBS

The purpose of the monumental tombs in the English Cemetery was clearly to impress. Their size and elaboration, and the early tombs' position along the road front leading north from the Variav Gate, are consistent with this objective. Furthermore, a number of commentators, beginning with John Ovington in 1696, interpret the tombs in terms of the rivalry between the English and Dutch East India Companies at Surat.<sup>81</sup> This rivalry in material symbols directly paralleled the commercial context in which English and Dutch were at best uneasy allies.<sup>82</sup> The projection of power and status through display was a feature not only of the tombs but also of the burial ceremonies, albeit these were arranged at very short notice. A witness to Sir George Oxenden's funeral observed:

that the natives ... though they may not come near a dead corps by reason they esteeme it a polluting and defiling themselves ... yet they will behold our buryalls, and at the



funerall for Sir George Oxinden [*sic*] the streets, balconys and tops of the houses were soe full as they could stand by another. At the grave after the corpse is interred, there is money thrown and given to the poor people; and our burying place, which is large and spacious, is adorned with several great and many handsome tombs and monuments, which many of the great men of the country esteem worth their sight.<sup>83</sup>

Ovington makes clear that such display was a conscious policy on the Company's part. He describes the procession by which the president and his colleagues went to spend time in gardens near the city on 'Solemn Days':

The President and his Lady are brought hither in Palanquins, supported each of them by six Peons, which carry them by four at once on their Shoulders. Before him at a little distance, are carried two large Flaggs, or *English* Ensigns, with curious *Persian* or *Arabian* Horses of State, which are of great value, Rich in their Trappings, and gallantly equipt that are led before him ... In this pompous Procession does the President, when he goes abroad, travel thro' the Heart of the City.<sup>84</sup>

Thus the purpose of the tombs – along with these other shows of display – was two-fold: to impress the local people and the Mughal administration; and to compete with (and, if possible, surpass) the other European companies at Surat, and above all their principal rival, the Dutch East India Company.

The grandiose nature of the tombs may be linked also with another characteristic of the English presence at Surat. The purpose of the enterprise was to make money through trade: the East India Company was privately financed and controlled. At the same time, it operated under the terms of a Royal Charter, first granted in 1600,<sup>85</sup> and on several occasions received direct diplomatic support from the English Crown: notably in the embassies of Sir Thomas Roe (1615–18) and Sir William Norris (1699–1702) to the Mughal Court. For the Mughal rulers, however, the mixing of diplomacy with commerce was deeply perplexing. As Mitchell puts it, they 'could not fathom a king's representative being sent to secure trading *farmāns*'.<sup>86</sup> They found it difficult to understand how a person claiming to be of noble rank could willingly fraternize with merchants and traders.<sup>87</sup>

The Surat tombs may be interpreted within this same discourse. The purpose of the East India Company factory was to make money – both for the factors at Surat and for the investors and directors in England. In order to be successful, however, they had to project an image of wealth and status, which was indeed largely a facade. Anderson may have been close to the mark when he observed of the Oxenden tomb: 'The body of an Indian Viceroy might have found here a worthy resting place; it is far too superb for the Chief of a Factory, and his brother who was only a subordinate.'<sup>88</sup> Yet while the presidents did not come from the first rank of English nobility, some of them were well connected. Thomas Rolt's father had married a first cousin of Oliver Cromwell;<sup>89</sup> George Oxenden was the third son of Sir James Oxenden (or, as Foster puts it, 'a younger son of an ancient family');<sup>90</sup> Gerald Aungier had a somewhat higher social standing – his brother became an earl<sup>91</sup> – but Francis Breton was a merchant who had lost his money and been obliged to seek employment with the Company.<sup>92</sup> Hence their tombs at Surat were very much grander than their social status in Britain would have supported, a contention which is underlined by the evidently much more modest tombs of those presidents who did retire to Britain and were buried in British churches or churchyards (for example, Edward Pearce, president 1655–6, at Whitlingham near Norwich, or John Spiller, president 1656–7, at Richmond in Surrey).<sup>93</sup> What would have been out of place in Britain was considered



entirely acceptable in western India, where the size of the tombs played a role in projecting a specific image of the East India Company and the wealth and status of its senior officials.

The message that the tombs conveyed was particular not only in the scale of the monuments but also in the architectural style that they adopted. Christian symbolism was avoided, absent even in the wording on the grave slabs. Detailed comparison with contemporary non-European burial monuments of western India holds great potential for a better understanding of the inspiration behind these monuments, and their relationship to indigenous architectural traditions and practices. Within the more general context of European architecture in India, Nilsson regards the earlier Surat tombs as something of an exception:

As stylistic phenomena they scarcely served as models for later works; later on, purely European forms were used in other places. It is true that here and there a circular temple with an unclassically curved dome may be found, which indicates that the Indian craftsmen have used their own vault-making technique, but this is an exception.<sup>94</sup>

The style of the early tombs was distinctively Indo-Islamic, but classical European features became steadily more conspicuous during the later eighteenth century, as, for example, in the tall-columned tombs of Mary and William Price. The 'pavilion' tombs of the early eighteenth century may also be considered a European interpretation of Indo-Islamic style. Pavilion tombs are found not only in the English and Dutch cemeteries at Surat but also in the Dutch cemeteries at Broach and Ahmedabad.

The gradual change in architectural style is not only a change in taste or fashion. When later writers described the Surat tombs as 'bad imitations' of Mahomedan models<sup>95</sup> or 'quaint rather than imposing',<sup>96</sup> they were reacting to the consciously foreign idiom that the earlier tombs adopted. As the British rose to political dominance in western India, the language of the monuments changed. Still impressive, they no longer espoused local architectural forms with little modification, but increasingly sought to reinterpret them within a European architectural convention. Thus the Surat tombs provide a mirror of the transition in which they also played an active part: the transformation of the British merchant communities into the rulers of western India.

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#### NOTES

1. Prakesh 1998, 23–6.
2. Tavernier 1676, 5.
3. Chakrabarti 2003, 112–13.

4. Rawlinson 1920, 119–21.
5. Ibid, 37, 56.
6. Foster 1899, 507, 509.

7. Ibid, 510n.
8. Fryer 1698, 214.
9. Ovington 1696, 227.
10. Sainsbury 1912, 341.
11. Ovington 1696, 232.
12. Ibid, 233.
13. Fryer 1698, 214-15.
14. Foster 1914, xix-xx.
15. Ibid, 275.
16. Commissariat 1980, 236.
17. Rawlinson 1920, 98-9.
18. Commissariat 1980, 512.
19. Letter of 31 July 1616, quoted in Foster 1899, 69.
20. Anon 1848, 124.
21. Curl 1993, 138, 145.
22. Varma 1983.
23. The preliminary exploration of the material remains (notably standing structures) relating to early European trading activities at Surat and other centres in Gujarat was undertaken in 2001 by the authors in conjunction with Dr Dilip Chakrabarti. The general archaeological and historical background to this research has already been set out (Chakrabarti 2003). A number of buildings and monuments were visited and recorded, and information was also supplied by local informants. With the kind permission of the Director-General of the Archaeological Survey of India, an architectural survey of the major monuments in the English Cemetery of Surat was subsequently carried out by the State Archaeological Service of Gujarat under the direction of Dr Y Chitalwala. This produced a plan of the cemetery as a whole, as well as plans of the individual major monuments together with an elevation of each. The documentation in the archives of the East India Company at the British Library in London - together with supplementary material in the Bodleian Library at Oxford - was examined in May 2003 by Rashmi Condra, but little reference to the tombs was found.
24. Foster 1914, 275n.
25. Ibid, 275; Commissariat 1980, 243.
26. Foster 1921, 201.
27. Ibid, 146.
28. Ibid, 201.
29. Rawlinson 1920, 136; Commissariat 1980, 502.
30. Foster 1921, 203.
31. Foster 1923, 99.
32. Foster 1927, 181-2.
33. Ibid, 183.
34. Sainsbury 1929, 335.
35. Foster 1923, 209.
36. Foster 1921, 114.
37. Foster 1923, 92, 209.
38. Bellasis 1862, 148; Rawlinson 1920, 138; Fawcett 1936, 280.
39. Commissariat 1980, 377, 504.
40. Ovington 1696, 236.
41. Commissariat 1980, 500.
42. Foster 1914, xix-xx.
43. Foster 1927, 19.
44. Fawcett 1936, 272.
45. Foster 1921, 201.
46. Koch 1991, 36-7.
47. Ibid, 95-6.
48. Ibid, 136.
49. Commissariat 1980, 670-1.
50. Mr Jolly Christie, a Surat resident, informed us that records of burials in the British, Dutch, Portuguese and Armenian cemeteries had been kept but were burned by their owner in 1991 or 1992.
51. Bellasis 1862, 151.
52. Ibid, 148.
53. Rawlinson 1920, 138.
54. Ovington 1696, 236.
55. Bellasis 1862, 149.
56. Commissariat 1980, 409.
57. Quoted by Commissariat 1980, 409-10.
58. Ibid, 410.
59. Wright 1918, 330-1.
60. Quoted by Rawlinson 1920, 145.
61. Fryer 1698, 254.
62. Ovington 1696, 235-6.
63. Williams 2000, 122.
64. Williams 2000; Curl 1993, 358-9.
65. Curl 1993, 137-8.
66. Williams 2000.
67. Bellasis 1862, 151.
68. Curl 1993.
69. Anderson 1856; Rawlinson 1920.
70. Anon 1848, 126.
71. Anderson 1856, 196-7.
72. See, for example, Commissariat 1980, 509.
73. Anon 1848, 133.
74. Rawlinson 1920, 75.
75. Commissariat 1980, 376.
76. Bellasis 1862, 147; Rawlinson 1920, 135.
77. Metcalf 1989, 21.
78. Fergusson 1876, 45.
79. Smith 1873, 286.
80. Metcalf 1989, 236.
81. Ovington 1696, 235-6; Anon 1848, 123; Bellasis 1862, 149; Rawlinson 1920, 149.
82. Maloni 1992, 46.
83. Streynsham Master, quoted in Foster 1927, 182; Rawlinson 1920, 134.
84. Ovington 1696, 232-3.

85. Rawlinson 1920, 37.
86. Mitchell 2000, 167.
87. Ibid, 147.
88. Anderson 1856, 197.
89. Foster 1921, 146.
90. Foster 1923, 92.

91. Foster 1936, vi.
92. Foster 1911, 39.
93. Foster 1921, 50, 113–14.
94. Nilsson 1968, 135–6.
95. Bellasis 1862, 151.
96. Rawlinson 1920, 135.

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